

Bytes & Pieces

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UNDER ATTACK

Some computer users argue that they don't need to protect their computers because there is nothing vital on them. Little do they know but they are major contributors to the spread of malware (worms/viruses/trojans) around the world. An unprotected computer is a malware writer's delight, as it can be used to spread their nasties far and wide.

Other computer users have no antivirus software, or what they have is so outdated as to be useless. A May 2003 study for the National Cyber Security Alliance conducted by America Online concluded that 62 percent of broadband consumers in the US were not running up-to-date antivirus (AV) software.

When was the last time you updated your antivirus software? If you are not actively fighting the scourge of malware, then you are, or soon will become, part of the problem.

For more on this important subject, follow this link and read what "PC Magazine's" Konstantinos Karagiannis has to say.

<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149,1373605,00.asp>

PAINTSHOP PRO TUTORIALS

User groups exist to help people with computers, or particular applications. If they cannot provide help because their members won't share, or lack the expertise, they tend to fade away. One that isn't going to disappear anytime soon is the Paintshop Pro Users Group. Their website offers almost 200 tutorials,

resources, special offers, contests, activities and “good old fun”. There are links to other sites with tutorials and even a search engine to help you locate additional tutorials.

Jasc Paintshop Pro is one of the most highly regarded graphics programs and, in recent times, version 5 has been given away on magazine disks, as have various add-ons, such as tubes and watermarks. While the tutorials have been upgraded to cover version 7, much of what they contain is applicable to version 5, so whatever version you have, this is the place to go.

<http://www.pspug.org>

KIDS AND THE INTERNET

Many adults consider that they can handle the more weird or hateful stuff on the Internet and therefore argue against restrictions or censorship. In any case, because of the way in which the Internet stretches across national boundaries censorship by any one country has little effect. One only has to consider how “effective” Australian bans on pornography have been – a couple of websites moved offshore.

Our children and grandchildren, however, were the reason that the Australian Government tried to do something. Most of us would agree that young children should not be exposed to pornography, conspiracy theories and other material that requires the exercise of judgment, or should be regarded with outright scepticism. Instead of supervising every minute of their children's Internet usage, parents often try software that offers a way to reign in what's accessible.



Fig.1: Kidsnet website has a heavy emphasis on education and maintains a whitelist of sites kids may visit.

The most popular parental-control applications maintain a blacklist of sites that can't be visited. Net Nanny and Cybersitter use this approach, along with keyword filtering and letting you restrict online time. The problem with a blacklist is that sites on the Web change so often that it can never be 100 percent up-to-date. I think a whitelist approach, maintaining a list of sites that kids can visit while blocking all others, works better. Kidsnet is the only site I have come across that uses this system. If you know of others, please let me know.

Any decision on how or whether to control Internet usage naturally lies with parents, grandparents and guardians, and different approaches may be used for different age groups and relative maturity, but, in my view, parents are failing in their responsibility if they allow young children to “surf” uncontrolled.

<http://www.kidsnet.org>

PAYPAL WORM STILL CIRCULATING

The PayPal worm that I reported last issue is still circulating. The version I received used a .COM.PIF, rather than the .COM.SCR that had been noticed earlier. I updated AVG immediately and ran it over the Eudora folder and it found it, calling it Mimapil.J. So update your antivirus software at every opportunity, or new variants may slip past and infect your computer.

<http://www.grisoft.com>

NEWSLETTER CHANGES

In order to simplify the process of making an email version of this newsletter, I have changed the masthead layout and font, and turned off the automatic recognition of URLs in the text. Instead of them showing in blue and underlined, they are now just normal text as this is being written. For some strange reason, active URLs do not copy and paste to my email program. After the PDF and email versions have been processed, the URLs may well turn back into hyperlinks. I will just have to wait and see.

Now all that is needed is to *Select All* the text, *Paste Special/Rich Text(RTF)* and tidy the formatting. Graphics have to be copied and pasted separately. Still an easy job, in fact, even easier now. Bob Curran offered to do it, but, unfortunately, there seem to have been problems with Bigpond, preventing him from receiving the files. Hopefully, it will all be sorted out soon.

SENIORLINK™

Have you ever wanted a plain English explanation of, say, how to do word processing with MS Word? How about browsing the Internet or doing email? We more experienced users sometimes forget that seniors beginning computing quickly get lost in the jargon, but SeniorLink doesn't. Their unique online learning centre not only provides mini-tutorials, “How to” user guides, email courses and newsletters, but they also run an email help desk – all in plain English so that the non-technical person can understand.

Other services include chat rooms, latest software reviews, latest virus information, selected download files, and Club bulletin boards.

All this costs, of course, and they charge a membership fee of \$55 per annum and accept advertising for their website to finance it. Compare the annual fee with the cost of attending a course and you'll see that it is really a bargain.

<http://www.seniorlink.com.au>

SORRY OPERA

The Norwegian developed browser, Opera, has long gloried in the title of “The Fastest Browser on Earth”. Now I haven't actually carried out any timings, but I suspect that title may have passed to an OpenSource newcomer, currently in version 0.7, called Firebird (see Fig 2).

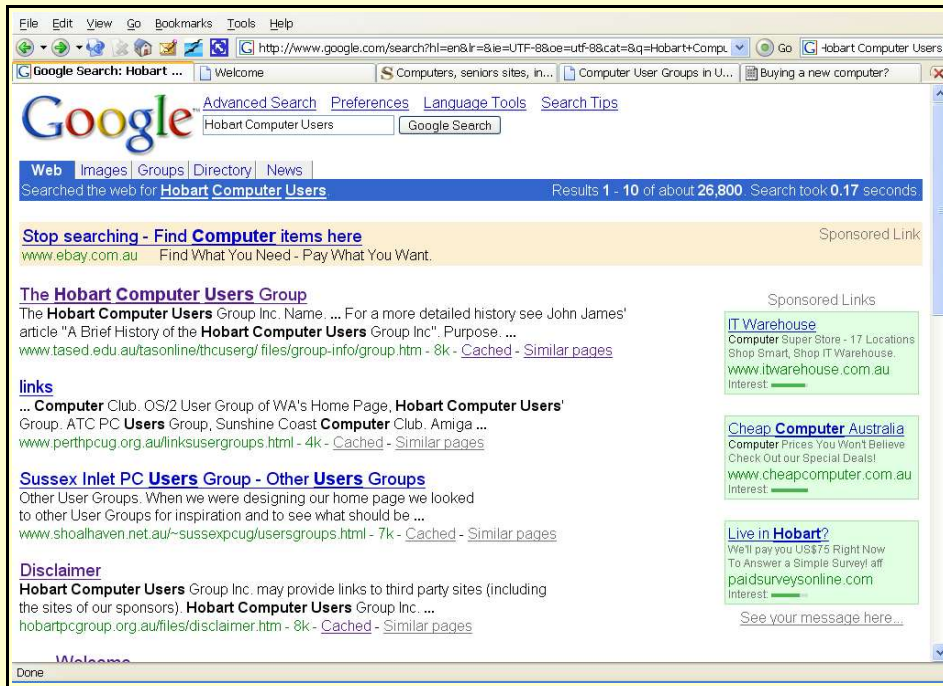


Fig 2: Mozilla Firebird (showing a Google search) customised to my requirements with Eudora, OpenOffice and Frontpage available from the toolbar, tabbed pages open, bookmark toolbar hidden, and Go button added to default layout.

Essentially Firebird is a rewritten, standalone version of Mozilla Navigator. It has been designed to be fast and cross-platform, making it suitable for use with Windows, Linux, OS/2, Solaris and Mac OS-X. It includes Mozilla's pop-up suppression, tabbed browsing and adaptable interface – all the features that have made Mozilla the browser of choice for many of the newer Linux distributions. However, it ditches the Composer and Mail baggage that tend to slow Mozilla down. (Mail is being developed as a standalone application under the name Thunderbird, and Composer is the basis of Lindows.com's effort to produce a Linux version of Frontpage or Dreamweaver, but those are other stories .)

I downloaded version 0.7, unpacked the archive, (which automatically installs it), and set the proxy for iprimus. Talk about fast. I hardly had time to blink when visiting sites that I recently visited with Mozilla. Even when loading sites that haven't been cached, it is impressively fast – admittedly over an ADSL connection.

Although its features have been carried forward from Mozilla, Firebird (originally called Phoenix) has its own look. It has an in-built Googlebar, enabling you to search with the world's most popular search engine. Touch typists can "click" on links by simply typing some of the text in the link without reaching for a mouse. There's automatic downloading and an "annoyance eliminator" which puts a stop to a number of other tricks that web designers inflict on you. Firebird's toolbars can be customised and its interface can be changed to any of the many themes that are available for free download. The area for viewing webpages has been maximised, giving more viewing area than any of its competitors.

One of the most useful features in my opinion, is tabbed browsing. When you want to open another website, click on the Open a Tab button, or use the keyboard or mouse shortcuts and another window is opened and assigned to a new tab at the top of the workspace. I have set a mouse shortcut so that when I click on a link with the scroll wheel button Firebird opens a new tab and when I click with the left mouse button, Firebird replaces what is in the current tabbed window. Simple, quick and effective – the way Firebird is intended to be used.

Firebird's designers subscribe to the W3C-approved rules, making it conform completely to the accepted standards. Gone are the days when Netscape went one way and Internet Explorer went another.

And, if the standard download doesn't have all the features you want, take a look at the 130 extensions that can be downloaded and installed separately. Instead of having the bloat of unused features, Firebird starts off

as a small package that includes all the essentials and allows you to tailor it to your requirements by adding just the additional features that you require, features like toolbar buttons for external applications, mouse gestures, default text size override, Chatzilla and Firebird Help (in a variety of languages).

At just 6 MB download, obtaining the standard Firebird package won't take you long, even on a dialup connection.

I have been using Mozilla for the last two or three months but now I am switching to Firebird. That's how impressed I am. If you take your web browsing seriously, you should try it too. You will still need Internet Explorer installed to access Microsoft updates, but that doesn't mean you have to put up with sluggish, bloated browsing.

<http://www.mozilla.org/products/firebird>

NEW LINKS ADDED TO WEBSITE

Two new links this week, giving you access to a wealth of information on hardware jumpers and Windows XP secrets. Check out "What's New" on the website for more details.

<http://hobartpcgroup.org.au>

BUY BUY

Digital camera bag

When I bought my digital camera, I was offered a bulky bag (at something like \$15) to put it in. I declined, having already spent far more than I had originally intended.

As it turns out, that was a sensible decision. Chickenfeed have nice little digital camera bags with a two zippered sections, one to hold the camera and one to hold the paraphernalia that goes with a digital camera. The bags come with a neck strap and have a loop on the back that can be used to attach them to your belt. In the aforementioned paraphernalia section there is a pouch for my memory card holder and four elastic loops for the AA batteries the camera uses. Strongly made and neatly finished and all for \$2.00! What more could you want? For more Chickenfeed bargains check their latest catalog at <http://www.chickenfeed.com.au>.

Neil Hutton offers:

Neil has a Kodak DC25 digital camera for sale. He's only selling because it is not supported under Windows XP – it works fine under Windows 98 or Me. \$50 ono. 6247 7543 or dadscafe@bigpond.net.au for more details.

Seen anything interesting?

Surely I'm not the only one who notices good buys around the town. If you notice something cheap, how about sharing the information with everybody? Email me so that I can include the details in the next issue, or, if it is urgent, send the details out directly to the HCUG-List by sending an email to hcug-list@lists.southcom.com.au.

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