

Slo Bytes *Hard Copy*

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San Luis Obispo PC Users Group

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The Olde Piano Roll

- By Lach MacDonald, SLO Bytes PCUG

THE CONVERGENCE OF THE COMPUTER WORLD AND THE DIVERGENCE OF MEMBERSHIP INTERESTS played counterpoint at the January 3rd meeting. George Campbell focused on MIDI and WAV files and demonstrated how to find and download or play classical music, jazz, piano solos and just about anything except vocals. Take www.infoseek.com/midi.html for MIDI FILES or midi.html and look for your favorites. George likened the digital output to the old piano rolls that output notes from mechanical rolls that connected to the keys, something like that. I'm too young to remember piano rolls; or is it too old to remember them. George brought up passages from Pachelbel, Elgar and Mozart for an audience that ranged from 35 to 40. Concurrently, Bob Hunt conducted the early Special Interest Group in Windows 98 sessions, with about two dozen participants at peak.

President Ray Miklas gave a brief report on the meeting held from noon to one for officers and volunteers, and I presume he'll have a report elsewhere in this newsletter, as well. Our non-profit status needs to be reaffirmed, we need volunteers to greet newcomers (join Nancy Watts for this welcome), and if you are awaiting ALPS rebates, supplies or responses get in touch with Ray pronto.

Bob Ward presented the featured program to about 50 members, a

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GIZMOS, Something for Everyone

- By Bob Ward, SLO Bytes PCUG

Gizmo n. 1 thingamabobs, contraptions, gadgets, widgets. CALL IT WHAT YOU LIKE but there is a company out there that will fill your hard disk with Gizmos. Play, Inc. is a company founded by a group of computer programmers who wanted to combine their favorite creations under one label. Put all those creations together, and you have over 300 megabytes of "thingamabobs"!

The program comes on CD, of course. There would be too many floppies to fit in the box. The program is divided into several areas, including clocks, calendars, games, calculators, screen savers, multimedia slide shows, and graphic cataloger for all those graphics on your hard disk.

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Calendar

Gene Barlow, who is well known throughout the user group community, will be our guest presenter. He will present both a new **PowerQuest** product, **Lost & Found**, and **PartitionMagic Version 4**. The former is an easy-to-use data recovery solution for PC users, the latter our trusted partitioning program with more exciting and powerful features than their previous version.

In place of George's early meeting presentation (1:00pm), Gene will put on a **Technical Training Seminar** on hard drive backup and recovery.

Gene is the Director of User Group Relations, representing PowerQuest Corporation and has worked with the user groups for over 18 years. Gene will offer "Special User Group Prices" on these and other products at the meeting, and will bring handouts and door prizes. It should be a super event. Don't miss it!

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February 14th
is St. Valentine's Day.
Did you buy something for
your sweetie's computer?

Buying Books on the Web

• By Doug Boulter Capital PC's Monitor.

I'VE WRITTEN A NUMBER OF ARTICLES ABOUT HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE for the Monitor and thought it was about time I told you something useful you can do with all of it. One of the most frequent things I do on the Internet is buy books. While this may seem a bit strange at first, books being a vastly outdated medium by Internet standards, the fact is we still depend on books for many things. As good as the Web is, books are better for doing research or reading for pleasure. Yet one of the benefits of the Web is that it makes books available to us beyond the wildest dreams of a few years ago. I'm going to tell you in this article how you can purchase both new and used books at the best prices simply by using your Web browser. New Books (Books in Print)

In past years, the best way to find a book in print was to visit your local bookstore and, if they didn't have it, get them to order it for you. This often took weeks, and you had to call periodically to see if it had come in. A second way was to find out who the publisher was and order directly. This also took weeks, but might save you some money. The advent of the bookstore titans, Barnes and Noble and Borders made things easier, but even they don't stock more than a fraction of the books in print.

Then came Amazon.com, a company that set up a Web site that would allow you to search all the books in print and order your book from the Web site, paying by credit card. The book would arrive at your home in a week or so. This inspired first Barnes and Noble and later Borders to set up similar Web sites. Competition brought down prices and speeded up deliveries. Now most of the books are available at a discount from the list price and arrive in 2 to 3 days. There are a host of other online booksellers, but only a very few compete across the complete line of books in print. I've discovered four others, and by the time you read this, there may be more or fewer. As you'll see, this is a cutthroat business. Most of the small companies choose to specialize. To test these booksellers, I visited their Web sites and priced four books at each site. While postage charges used to vary, each now charges \$3.95 for UPS Ground/U.S.P.S Express Mail shipping. The Web sites are listed in TABLE 1 (at the end of this article).

The books I picked were a typical college text, Macroeconomics by Paul Samuelson and William Nordhaus, 1998 (paperback); a bestseller, Midnight in

the Garden of Good and Evil by Paul Berendt (hardback); and two fairly specialized literary texts, Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston, 1991 (University of Illinois Press hardback), and The Complete Tales of Washington Irving edited by Charles Neider, 1998 (paperback).

Each of these Web sites has its own search engine. Most allow you to conduct a simple search from the home page, searching either by title or author. All but A-1 Books and Book.Com allow you to conduct a more complex search, specifying both title and author, and/or the ISBN number of the book. Surprisingly, there were some glitches in the search engines. Doing an author search on the Samuelson and Nordhaus text, I found that Barnes and Noble had decided that Nordhaus was the primary author of the current edition, and it could not be found by searching Samuelson. Borders, on the other hand, could not find it under Nordhaus, though his name was listed as co-author when the book was found under Samuelson. Book.Com and All Direct couldn't find it under Nordhaus either. Obviously, as good as the search engines are, they aren't perfect.

Many of the Web sites offer to recommend books for you to read and have reviews for a few of the more popular books you might select. I personally find these features fairly useless, as I go to a site looking for specific books, but I'm assuming that someone finds it interesting. One feature I do like is the offer to notify you by e-mail when books with a particular keyword in the title or on a particular subject are published.

Ordering from these companies involves your using their secure server to provide a credit card number. All accept VISA, MasterCard, American Express, and Discover except for Bookserve and All Direct, which won't accept Discover. If you are using Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator or Communicator, or AOL, you should have no trouble accessing the secure servers. While the encryption isn't totally secure, I believe it offers a generally adequate level of

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THE GRID

Better, Faster, Reliable Internet Access

California's leading x2 56k Internet Service Provider

\$19.95

per month

*all memberships require a one-time activation fee of \$25

SIGN-UP ONLINE

www.thegrid.net

1-888-333-grid

- Unlimited time
- No busy-signal policy
- Toll-free tech support
- Statewide access
- Super fast network
- All digital lines



BUYING BOOKS

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security. If you remain distrustful, most of these sites offer you the option of faxing or calling in your credit card number. Once you have ordered, you should get an e-mail confirmation that your order was received and then a confirmation that the book was sent. If the company sends with UPS, you may get a tracking number enabling you to go to the UPS Web site and track your book shipment.

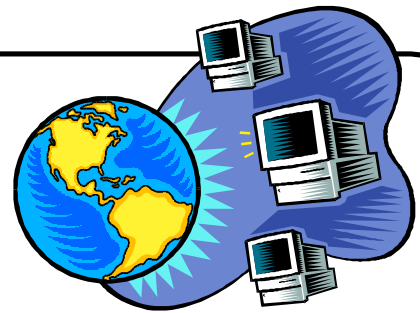
All these booksellers guarantee satisfaction. Be warned, however. All companies require you to mail back any returns. Barnes and Noble and Borders will not accept returns to their stores in your neighborhood. There is also a new Web site, <http://www.jungle.com>, that allows you to comparison shop across the various booksellers. Jungle has just been bought by Amazon.Com, and the Amazon price is listed first in the comparison. Borders isn't carried on Jungle's site at the present time. I found the Jungle price quotes to correctly reflect what was advertised on the various Web sites. In addition, Jungle included some booksellers that specialize to an extent. I did not include them in the comparison because they don't offer all four books. The Jungle site links to the booksellers' sites or allows you to order from its site. Jungle also offers comparison shopping for other items besides books. The site is a bit hard to navigate, however, so be prepared to work your way through a few pages before you get to the comparison sections.

Do I have a favorite online bookseller? While I like Barnes and Noble's Web site marginally better than the rest, I've shopped all of the big, three. Price is pretty much the driver for me, with the best price getting my business. As you can see, the book selling business has become extremely competitive, and I expect that some of these companies will go out of business or off the Web. At the present time, however, they offer a huge opportunity for the book buying

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The Surfboard

- By Dorothy Kirk,
IBM/PCUG Redding,
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JANUARY AND FEBRUARY ARE POSSIBLY VERY DEPRESSING MONTHS because the excitement of Christmas is over and there is nothing special to look forward to but bleak weather ahead for months. So-o-o, this month is devoted to fun things on the web. From "Why feet smell" to weird artifacts, to commiserating with fellow workers. Enjoy!

DESPAIR, INC <http://www.despair.com> — This site "was created with a singular vision, to create humorous products with a cynical bent." The Demotivator of the month: Mediocrity It takes a lot less time and most people won't notice the difference until it's too late.

HOUSE <http://www.pophouse.com> — An amazing online emporium of Pop-Culture artifacts. Among hundreds of unusual and kitchy items, I found a colorful tin wind-up bear reminiscent of the 30's; a wind-up smiling duck riding a tricycle with helicopter-like blades on its hat; a Betty Boop lunch metal lunch box; bouncy killer tomatoes with great expressions; a book that is a guide to bad taste; a set of cards chronicling the history of the Blues; and hundreds more. Each artifact is accompanied with a picture.

GHOSTS OF THE PRAIRE <http://www.praireghosts.com/> — Since I think believing in ghosts is ridiculous, I think this site is hilarious. If you are of like mind you will think it's fun, too. If you are not, well, OK, take it seriously; it's a free country. Did you know that you couldn't hunt ghosts with a digital camera? What do you take while ghost hunting? Did you know that you could take spirit photos in a cemetery? Talk about invasion of privacy!

FLATTERY CHATTER <http://www.shareware.com/DD/sw/0%2C156%2C1209-1-002%2C00.html> — This is not actually a site, but since this month is devoted to fun things on the web, I am including it. It should cheer you up. A little interactive sidekick sits in a tiny window on your screen, bombarding you with a steady stream of compliments and flattery. There are several ways to to configure it to your satisfaction.

DISGRUNTLED <http://www.disgruntled.com> — Are you fed up with work? You are not alone. "Disgruntled" is a business magazine for people who work for a living. It is loaded with articles on work grievances as well as personal stories. Commiserate together! Warning! The content in this zine may be amusing only if you are uninvolved. OK for retirees.

YOU CAN <http://www.beakman.com/> — This site has been introduced before in this column, but is worth getting acquainted with again. Fun for all ages. Just click on any button and see what happens. Pages and links to funny and educational places.



BUYING BOOKS

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public to get a much better price on books than ever before.

USED BOOKS (BOOKS NO LONGER IN PRINT)

If you're doing any kind of serious scholarly research, you've probably been stymied by a book you want for your collection being out of print. Perhaps you want to own a book you remember having read long ago, or perhaps you are a collector of rare books and first editions. Perhaps you want an autographed copy of a book. If so, you'll find the booksellers listed above to be singularly unhelpful. Several of them will offer to search for out-of-print books, but they take forever to produce results, and their prices are high. Until recently, your only other choice was to browse old bookstores, or get a rare book dealer to assist you. If your experience was much like mine, these searches were pretty much fruitless. In the last year, I've come across three sites where used book dealers list their books for sale. As each site has a large number of dealers associated with it, you will be amazed at what you can find. Point your Web browser to the following: ABE Books (www.abebooks.com), Bibliofind (www.bibliofind.com), and Interloc (Interloc.com). Each of the sites allows you to conduct expert searches, adding first edition to the search criteria. While you can't order from the sites, if you find the book you want in a condition and price that are acceptable to you, you can e-mail the bookseller to find out whether the book is still available. While none of these booksellers I've used has a secure server, you can fax or call them with your credit card number. Additionally, the sites allow you to submit a want list, and you will be notified by e-mail if a book you want becomes available.

One problem is that ABE Books and Interloc make new listings available to dealers before they are available to the public. This means that dealers get first choice of new

books. I can't tell from the sites or by experience whether this hurts individuals, but if you are a serious collector, I wouldn't give up on your regular dealers just yet. Each of the sites has its own set of strengths and weaknesses. Some dealers are members of all three. All are easy to use. ABE Books generally has the most listings. The problem is that they are very sloppy about removing the books their dealers have sold from their listings. On several occasions I have called a dealer to find that the book was long gone. Interloc is almost as good as ABE Books, and is more efficient at promptly removing books that have been sold. It has fewer listings, however. Bibliofind does not give dealers first crack at books. On the other hand, it has the fewest listings. I've ordered at least 20 used books that I've found listed on these sites.

In my experience, the dealers are accurate in listing the condition of the books (once you've learned the jargon of the grading such as "foxing") and respond very quickly. I've ordered everything from the standard poetry anthology of the 1850s to an autographed work of fiction from the 1930s that made a great Christmas present. I don't buy rare books, just working books, but I've seen some wonderful first editions and autographed books for sale at very reasonable prices. For rare first editions and rare autographs, however, be prepared to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars. Again, however, the wide range of dealers often permits you to comparison shop.

Final Comment Is it clear now why the Internet is a boon to serious readers of books? We can buy more at better prices than ever before from the comfort of our desks. Publishers will find new markets and new readers. If you've been waiting to shop on the Web, you now have a reason. Books, however, are just the beginning. If you haven't heard about comparison shopping for houses, cars, computer hardware and software, and more on the Web, you will!

Doug Boulter is a Contributing Editor of the Monitor. Truthfully now, how many of you thought he would

be interested in 19th century poetry? You can contact him at doultr@erols.com.

TABLE 1. Comparison of Booksellers on the Web Selling All Books in Print

BOOKSELLER	WEB ADDRESS
Amazon.Com	www.amazon.com
Barnes & Noble	www.barnsandnoble.com
Borders	www.borders.com
A-1 Books	www.a1books.com
All Direct	www.alldirect.com
Bookserve	www.bookserve.com
Book.Com	www.book.com



A message from the President

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE PURCHASED AN ALPS PRINTER and failed to receive satisfaction from ALPS, below is the 1/8/99 response from "Sheri Smith" <sheri.smith@alps.com> to me. Sheri is the Field Marketing Supervisor at ALPS who was the main speaker at our 4 October 1998 Slobytes meeting.

"I am very sorry to hear about these problems. I will take action to make sure everyone of your members are taken care of immediately. I will be in touch with you soon to let you know what has happened. And I plan on getting a hold of each member to give them my sincere apology." I am happy that Sheri will take action and our members will receive satisfaction. ALPS produces great printers, notwithstanding their Customer Services department.

—RAY MIKLAS

GIZMOS

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There are several other programs that will be mentioned later.

CLOCKS

Unfortunately you can't wear these on your wrist. But you can keep them running on your computer. There are two analog clocks (moving hands) and two digital clocks. You can wake up to an alarm similar to the annoyance you probably have next to your bed right now, or you can wake up to your favorite music on CD. Just set the alarm to any track on the music CD in your computer and rest assured you will be getting out of bed to hit the snooze alarm found on all the clocks. If you are a geek that requires complete accuracy, then you can log on to Atomic Clock in Colorado via the internet to set either of your digital clocks to the precise millisecond.

CALENDARS

If you're like me, a calendar or reminder notepad is a must. Gizmo's calendars come in four categories: yearly, monthly, weekly and daily. They are all interactive. Click on a month in the yearly calendar and it brings up the monthly calendar. Arrows to the left of each week will display single weeks, while clicking on a specific day will show a day calendar for appointments. Type in your appointment times in any order for the day. Gizmos automatically sorts them by time. If you're not the visual type, an alarm can be set to go off at the time of your appointment along with a reminder that flashes on the screen. The monthly calendar will show moon phases which it calculates from the timezone you set in Windows. All major holidays are also recognized. You can move months or years ahead or behind by clicking on the appropriate arrows. Is there a limit? I don't know, but I do know I was born on a Tuesday and my 100th birthday falls on a Monday. This may give you an idea of the calendar's range.

Why are there so many calendars? All of them do the same thing,

all have the same dates. It's the pictures!!! So why not customize your own calendars, any and all of them. Gizmos comes with a program called Picture Explorer. Click on the picture explorer icon and search and catalog your whole hard disk of graphics. Selectively search for 1 of 8 different formats or all of them. So now that you have all your animals, kids, and wife's pictures cataloged, choose one picture and drag it to the yearly calendar. It's as simple as that. You can put custom pictures on the daily and yearly calendar as well. They appear muted in the background as to not interfere with any writing of notes on top of them. Are calendars printable, you bet.

GAMES

There are several games from which to choose. Pick on any of six card games. Yes, Freecell is one of them. Also choose from Nerts, Forty Thieves, Solitaire, Pyramid, and Spider. You can make your card game more realistic by turning on the shuffling sounds. Where's my visor and green felt table? If you don't like the default pictures on the cards, click on Styles and choose from a variety of Gizmos pictures or drag one from your picture explorer. Also under a separate icon is Picture Puzzler. It was a real puzzle to me as I didn't understand the program even after reading the documentation. I'm sure it works, but it does little to boost my ego or give me the confidence to play the simplest of games. I'll give it to my kids. They'll have it figured out in 5 minutes.

CALCULATORS

If your calculators are like mine, their either solar and you are working in a dim lit room where the light isn't enough to energize them, or your batteries need changing and the display is so dim, you resort to pencil and paper. Gizmos comes with 4 calculators: Simple 4 function with memory, Financial, Scientific, and Programmable calculator.

The Financial calculator programs in local sales tax, set or let float the decimal point and, round off to the nearest cent. It will also print a

reference number for your calculations. The Scientific Calculator does mean, standard deviation, statistics, Boolean (and, or, not), exponents, logs, trig functions, binaries, exponents and many other functions too numerous to count. The Programmable calculator wraps all the other calculators into one mean looking calculator. Take all the functions above, add programming capabilities, throw in a couple dozen more features and you have the ultimate calculator.

All four calculators have several things in common. If you want a printed copy of your entries then click on the electronic paper roll before starting. This brings up another window, and shows you the entries as you make them. It may then be printed as proof of operation. There is also a statistics workpad which stores data until the scientific or programmable calculator are called into action.

SCREEN SAVERS

I'm not much for screen savers as I like to give my CPU a rest now and then. But combine the visual and sound of Gizmos Electro and it's quite impressive. Here's a glass ball which bounces around your screen. Every time it hits an edge, it makes a "Star Wars" sound. I don't know how to describe the sound other than something from deep space (OK, I know you can't hear sounds in space!) If you have stereo speakers attached to your sound card, watch out, you are in for a treat! You can change the gravity, bounce and speed, but don't turn off the sound, you'll lose the effect.

Something not quite so robust, but more "lite" is Scene Savers. Gizmos has created several pleasant 360 degree murals that move at the speed you choose from left to right or right to left on your screen. Choose from an ocean scene, blue skies, sunsets, lakes, woodlands and more. To add to the total effect of these serene screen savers, add your favorite music CD in the background. The result is quite pleasing.

How about a revolving cube bouncing around on your screen? Just

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GIZMOS

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thinking of the programming power of this screen saver makes my head spin. Here's a revolving cube, slow, fast, direction, all controlled by you. Bring up Picture Explorer from Gizmos Launch pad and drag and drop your favorite pictures on to the cube faces as it rotates. Change the center of rotation and the size of the cube. Grab a corner with your mouse button depressed, move the mouse quickly while letting up on the button and watch it spin. Amazing!

Back to music. Gizmos comes with a color organ. If you want your screen to come alive with colors and music this is the ultimate screen saver. There are 8 presets, any of which can be reconfigured. You have total control over color range and sensitivity, and wave range and sensitivity. This means you can adjust the colors to react to the intensity and beat of the music coming from your CD. More intense and loud sounds elicit a more intense movement of the colors. You'll need to peel your eyes from the screen after watching this for a couple minutes.

PERFORMER 98

Personally, this is the highlight of Gizmos. It definitely makes one look like a professional when creating presentations or slide shows. The ease of use is astounding, and the results are better than anything I've ever seen created by other presentation programs.

Performer 98 combines pictures, a LARGE number of transition screens such as fades, wipes, etc, and music. I count 161 effects. A whole presentation can be created within 10 minutes. All work is done on a presentation bar across the top of the screen. The sequence of events is quite simple. There are five control buttons on the left side of the screen: shows, pictures, effects, sounds, and music. The show button is used to choose an existing show for presentation or editing. To create a new presentation, first click on the picture button. This brings up a icon based directory tree, similar to

what you find in Windows 95. Navigate your hard disk until you find the subdirectory containing the pictures for your presentation. They will be shown as small thumbnails, 5 across. Click and drag the pictures to the top of the screen, placing them in the sequence you want for your presentation. You can control the duration of any picture on the screen in seconds. Some presentations are conducted with a narrative by the person giving the presentation. Therefore, one option requires the space bar to be pressed before moving to the next picture. The effects are shown as thumbnails too. Just drag and drop them in between the pictures to which you want to apply the effect. The pictures will make room for the effects icons or more pictures should you want to edit the presentation later. The length you want the picture to remain on the screen, the size, etc. are all controlled in the options menu.

Next the sounds button brings up the icon directory tree. Here you can select individual wav files and attach them to individual pictures. You may need to adjust the duration of each picture to match the length of the wav file. Finally, background music can be added to the whole performance by selecting a file from the music icon. If the length of the background does not match the length of the presentation, you may have the file repeat until the end of the show.

Finally, preview and save your presentation. Professional results are just minutes away from beginning to end. We're not done yet. Wouldn't it be great to send your presentation across the internet? Yes, Gizmos seamlessly connects to your internet provider, compresses your presentation and sends it along with a Performer executable file to anyone of



your choosing. What a great way to send your pictures to relatives along with music and narratives. The files are not small, and depend on the size of the individual graphics. The player is 577K by itself, but only has to be sent once.

VAULT & SHREDDER

Two other icons that show up on your desktop and are part of Gizmos are Vault and Shredder. The vault is a place to drop sensitive documents that you want encrypted and password protected. Because of their encryption method, consider them very safe. Just don't forget your password? The Shredder is used in place of the waste basket. Even though programs are dragged and dropped and emptied in the Windows wastebasket, any good undelete program will retrieve those files. Drop them in the Shredder and they are gone forever. No chance of recovery here. So do make sure of the things you shred. No amount of "glue" will put them back together again.

THEMES

Lastly, one item that appears in the Start/Programs menu under Gizmos is the themes icon. If you bought the Windows Plus package you'll remember part of that package included different themes. Gizmos too has added 5 different themes if you get tired to the same old Windows layout. They have also included the Windows default should you like to go back and see what it originally looked like.

Despite the fact that the program takes over 300MB of hard disk space, it's well worth the real estate. You can do two partial installs of about 70MB each, but you will not get the full functionality nor the ability to send those pictures to your relatives via the internet. Only when the whole program is loaded is everything functional. The CD-ROM is not needed after full installation of the program.

Help menu's are extensive. You will find them with each module of Gizmos. Further documentation is

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GIZMOS

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available at their website www.play.com. If you are looking for a set of thingamabobs, contraptions, or gadgets to add to your hard disk, choose Gizmos and look no further.

Gizmos \$49.95
Play Inc., 2890 Kilgore Rd.
Rancho Cordova CA 95670-6133
www.play.com

PIANO ROLL

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demonstration of Gizmo, a program consisting of 350 MB of varied programs created by a group of programmers. You don't need to keep all this disk-devouring program, which offers customizing icons, many clocks, games, calendars and utilities. You can pick and choose and get by with 150 MB of stuff. With Gizmo you can set your clock to the atomic clock in Colorado, make up slideshows, send compressed attachments to anyone who has a sound card and the internet. You can put archival items in a vault (don't forget how to open it, though). And everyone knows that files dumped in your recycle can be recovered by your average fifth grader, unless you use Gizmo's Shredder. Just be sure not to shred your secret memo to yourself with all your passwords.

The program, with 150-page manual, lists at \$49.95. The program concluded with the singular giveaway of the day: Thomas Bennett won Gizmo.

Several members have responded to Ray Miklas as volunteers. Be sure to help set up if you arrive early and to take your chair to the back of the meeting room at a minimum. Remember, keep food and drink away from the meeting room. And bring those unwanted and unsalable magazines, software programs and peripherals to give free to other members. One person's junk is another person's treasure.



Y2K is coming!

From the Internet, Unknown Author—Submitted by Ruben Thornerfelt, IBM/PCUG Redding

I KNOW THIS GUY whose neighbor, a young man, was home recovering from having been served a rat in his bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

So anyway, one day he went to sleep and when he awoke he was in his bathtub and it was full of ice and he was sore all over. When he got out of the tub he realized that HIS KIDNEYS HAD BEEN STOLEN and he saw a note on his mirror that said "Call 911!"

But he was afraid to use his phone because it was connected to his computer, and there was a virus on his computer that would destroy his hard drive if he opened an e-mail entitled "Join the crew!" He knew it wasn't a hoax because he himself was a computer programmer who was working on software to save us from Armageddon when the year 2000 rolls around.

His program will prevent a global disaster in which all the computers get together and distribute the \$600 Neiman-Marcus cookie recipe under the leadership of Bill Gates. (It's true-I read it all last week in a mass e-mail from BILL GATES HIMSELF, who was also promising me a free Disney World vacation and \$5,000 if I would forward the e-mail to everyone I know.) The

poor man then tried to call 911 from a pay phone to report his missing kidneys, but reaching into the coin return slot he got jabbed with an HIV-infected needle around which was wrapped a note that said, "Welcome to the world of AIDS."

Luckily he was only a few blocks from the hospital-the one where that little boy who is dying of cancer is, the one whose last wish is for everyone in the world to send him a pop top tab and the American Cancer Society has agreed to pay him a nickel for every tab he receives. I also sent him an e-mail with a bunch of x's and o's in the shape of an angel (if you get it and forward it to 20 people you will have good luck but 10 people you will only have OK luck and if you send it to less than 10 people you will have BAD LUCK FOR SEVEN YEARS.)

So anyway the poor guy tried to drive himself to the hospital, but on the way he noticed another car driving along without its lights on. To be helpful, he flashed his lights at the other car and was promptly shot as part of a gang initiation. And as he lost consciousness he remembered that it's a little-known fact that the Y1K problem caused the Dark Ages.



Windows 98 Annoyances

- Book review by Billy Ball, IBM/PCUG Redding

SINCE BEFORE WINDOWS 98 WAS RELEASED TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, I have been collecting and saving hints and tips for this new version of Windows. There is and can never be an operating system that will fit the needs and desires of all users. So you enjoy the good features and figure ways around the features that do not meet with your approval. Hints and tips provide a method of not only learning features of the new system, but ways to adapt it for your use.

Windows 98 Annoyances, written by David A. Karp, provides an abundance of hints, tips and “work-arounds” to assist you to better understand and utilize your operating system. The target reader would be intermediate and advanced users, however some more advanced beginners could understand and make use of the majority of the book. When I first opened this book and began reading it, the obvious conclusion of the author was that Windows 98 was not much to brag about. I have had experiences with many operating systems, including minimal use of DOS and then earlier versions of Windows, starting with Windows 3.0. In my view, there was a great improvement made with each release of Windows, so I was a bit annoyed with the book. However, as I read further, I discovered that the authors “annoyances” were mine also. After his initial observations of Windows 98, Mr. Karp takes an “if it’s wrong, let’s fix it” approach, which was quite refreshing. The book’s well designed layout and organization has chapters logically grouped into functions and topics.

The book covers a multitude of topics including:

- Keyboard shortcuts
- Customizing the desktop and interface to your own needs
- Using Windows’ Scripting host as a means of eliminating your personal annoyances.
- DOS work-arounds (DOS is still a part of Win98).
- Working with SCSI devices.
- In-depth coverage of Web integration.
- Understanding and using the registry.

This last item was one of special interest to me. My largest annoyance with the Windows’ operating system is its use of the Registry Files, this is the *hub* of the whole system. I have endeavored to understand and conquer this dragon for several months now, and this book’s section on the Registry has steered me in the right direction. I now understand it better and feel that I can deal with this monster with improved confidence.

Bundled with *Windows 98 Annoyances* is a CD-ROM containing the book’s code and sample scripts (to save you from having to type them manually). It also contains a time-limited demo of utilities from O’Reilly and Associates—a set of programs that offers fixes for some of the annoyances discussed in the book without too much effort on your part. Although many of these programs are duplicates of programs offered free by Microsoft’s Tweak UI and others

are shareware, plain-English explanations of their uses is refreshing

Windows’ 98 Annoyances is published by O’Reilly and Associates, Inc. and, in my opinion, it is well worth the listed price of \$24.95. A pleasant addition to your library if you find dumbed-down Windows 98 help books less than useful. **Web site: www.annoyances.org**



Researching Online for DUMMIES

“Find out how to use the web effectively for all kinds of research projects!”

- Book review by Michael Saccomano, IBM/PCUG Redding

ONCE I GOT PAST THE TITLE (I am adamantly opposed to derogatory labels for people) this book confirmed what I had heard from others—the series is actually fairly well written. (It is still unlikely I will choose to read any other books with a dummies title).

This book is written about, and for, serious research. But much of what Reva (Basch) says is applicable to the general problem (we all seem to have) of finding information on the net. And she presents it in a light-hearted, humorous method that helps compensate for the fact that some of this stuff is just plain dull!

She starts with the obvious: the popular search engines—how to use them, what each one emphasizes, and how to get the most out of them. From there she moves into some fairly specialized engines—targeting people, companies, mail lists, discussion groups, maps, software, etc. Then, how to “drill down” to the specific data you want from the general, and often discouraging, results that come back the first couple of tries.

Also covered in fairly extensive detail are “proprietary” sites—Lexis-Nexis, Dialog—and other very deep, very extensive databases that you pay for. Reva provides a very detailed look at what they contain, and a very compelling reason why they may be the appropriate answer to that difficult “What...” you need to answer. And she provides lots of great hints on maximizing the results while minimizing the (often financial) pain.

Also valuable is the chapter on Copyright issues, and hints/suggestions on how to evaluate IF the information you just found is reasonable, even true! PLUS an included CD that has links to the (thousands) of sites referenced in the text, and a lot more.

Overall, a good book. One that I would recommend that smart people also consider.

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www.dummies.com

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Membership: Dues are \$25 per year. Full membership entitles you to our monthly newsletter, full use of the public domain software library software drawing at the end of the meetings.

Article Submission: Deadline for submission of articles is the 15th of each month. Articles should be provided in ASCII format without any type of formatting from your word-processor. We prefer articles as attached email files, on disk, or hardcopy.

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Meeting Times

GENERAL MEETINGS are held the 1st Sunday of each month. Our meeting location is the San Luis Obispo I.O.O.F. Hall on Dana Street

The general meeting starts promptly at 2:30pm.

Special Interest Groups (SIGS) meet at 1:00pm - 2:15pm



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Treasurer's Report

• By Bob Ward



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