SLO Bytes Hard Copy
A publication of the San Luis Obispo PC Users Group
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General Meeting, by Bill Avery

Alan and Ray led off the January Main Meeting with announcements of the upcoming SIG meetings, hosted by several members in separate locations. Ralph Sutter noted that the HTML group would meet Monday, at 6:30 pm, Jan. 6, 2003, at his home in Arroyo Grande. They planned on discussing methods of posting pictures to a Website and practicing with Ralph's site. Alan also noted that the Linux SIG would meet at the KCBX Training Center at 6:30 pm on Thursday, Jan. 9, 2003. Topics include updates on security fixes and how to do them automatically. Also the topic of burning CD-ROMs, both images and music, is scheduled to be covered, as well as Knoppix, a bootable Debian GNU/Linux system with 2 GB of compressed software that runs directly from CD-ROM, without using any hard disk space on the host system. See: http://www.knoppix.net/ for details. Another event, covering "Linux on the Desktop", is coming up in San Diego, CA is an important topic.

Our Club Guests this month were Jim Dodge, a new computer user, and Jim Middleton, returning after a few years absence. Ray turned the meeting over to Guy Kuncir, who took the stand to introduce our Speaker of the Month, Carl Patton, from the Staples Office Supply stores. [See http://staples.com/]

Carl's topic focused on "Shopping On-Line" and used the Staples Website as an example to illustrate many features found in web shopping sites on the Net. He provided a complete printed overview of his presentation, so each member could follow along as he covered his "Shopping Tour".

Contrasting the practices of other "e-tailers" with Staples, Carl noted that no pop-up ads, uncontrolled outside links, or complex product matrices are found on the Staples site. Tracking Order Status is made as easy as possible, with simple and direct navigation to products -- almost like being in the real world store and picking items off the shelf. One SLOBYTES member asked about Will-Call Shipping, which allows a customer to pick up their order in their local store rather than shipping to their door, which may take longer. Carl showed us how to do that on the Website by putting the store address in the Shipping address entry box for an order. If the order is over $50.00 in total value, no shipping is charged. Orders under that amount are charged for shipping, even if delivered to a store. If an item is out of stock at a store, there is an option for the order to be picked up, at a later date, without a shipping charge, if the store desires to do that.

Shopping for repeat orders is easier on the Staples site because of the list called "Favorite Items". In it you can "save a list of the products you buy most". From their "Help/Timesavers" page, they note that "You can also create multiple lists - like a list of products you buy once a month and a list of products you buy only as needed". For some companies, this can save a lot of time. Also, special promotions are featured on the top of the home page for quick access. Items featured as "specials on the web" are priced at that special price, even if you buy them at the stores.

To find a product easily on the Staples' Website, use the "Direct Search" feature to locate an item by entering a Manufacturer or Product Name or a SKU (Stock Keeping Unit) or the first 6 digits of an Item No. into the text box, in a single word search. For multi-word searches use either Manufacturer, Product Name, and/or Product Description to find an item. Carl used Sony Digital Cameras as an example. The summary listed all the matching items by category and there were 5 items shown for Sony Cameras. On a new page, the Comparison Shopper lists the prices and specifications of competing models lets a Web shopper decide which item has the greatest value for a given price -- a very handy feature. You can also print this information on a local printer for future reference. Carl noted that you can use "Ctrl-P" to print what is inside the frame to get just the details from the image without the extraneous outside frame information.   As an example, I tried the Digital Camera comparison chart for units under $200.
http://www.staples.com/Catalog/Compare/compchart.asp?ClassID=140465&FunctionType=1 All the important specifications were shown, side by side, to make shopping easier. After a camera is selected, the supporting equipment and supplies are also displayed.

As a second selection, Carl chose "Scanners" from the products list under "Technology". In these areas, great emphasis is placed on details, to make the best choice of products. So the style of Scanner, Flatbed, is displayed as a list of available models and manufacturers. This is compared to wandering into a store and trying to get a handle on all the available items using the salesman's information and product descriptions. Research on the web is much better organized, and easier to digest, than the old way of random store searches. On the other hand, most people still like to talk about products with other people, to see how they like a certain feature or item.

Next, we looked at a typical "Shopping Cart", which contained the user's order and all the details required to deliver it and complete the transaction as quickly as possible. Filling out the "Profile" forms usually takes more time than standing in line at a checkout counter but once it has been completed, the process applies to all future on-line transactions and is much easier the second time around. Selection of a user name and password is an important step too. The credit card information is sent over a secure web site as shown by the closed lock symbol on most browsers. Delivery time is usually specified and freight charges are estimated also. The sales tax issue is covered for both resale permits and normal purchases, at least on the Staples site. Coupons are also available and can be entered on-line, just as you would do at the store. The final step is to review the order and approve the purchase. With a click of the mouse, the contents of the Shopping Cart are on their way! Later, you can check the status of the order by ZIP Code or UPS Tracking number, as well as the Staples Order #. If a shipment is to be delivered to a Staples store, Carl made a point to mention that the Name and Phone number must be your data, not the name of the Staples store or their phone number! After the order is completed, an email confirmation will be sent, and that address will not be shared with any other party, according to Carl.

When shopping on-line, always use a user name and password. Protect your credit information. Never buy on an unsecured transaction screen. Use Verisign recommendations, if prompted. Always sign-off when you are done shopping.

We closed our meeting with a Qwik-Pick raffle for items left over from Christmas, a $5 Starbucks certificate and another one from Subway Sandwiches and a 24-Hour Timer Clock. A mouse pad donated by Celina Penalba was also included. Over 60 members attended this meeting and we hope to see them all, and more, next month for our February 2, 2003 meeting. See you there!

Alpha Five Database Program, Version 5
Review by Marvin Baxendale
SLO Bytes PCUG

Alpha Five, Version 5 is one of several relational database management systems currently available. Relational refers to the fact that tables are linked or relate to each other such that data need not be repeated in each table. This results in saving of space (minor in today's environment) and greater simplicity of data entry and management. Alpha Five is quite a powerful program and is aimed directly at users of Microsoft Access and File Maker Pro, two of the competing database systems.

The heart of the Alpha Five program is the control panel, which has tabbed pages showing tables/sets, forms, browses, labels, etc. Each page lists the appropriate applications that have been created. Setting up new tables, forms, or reports is easy using the genie with a number of pre-formatted templates. If the templates don't fit, you can edit them to suit your application or start the design from scratch and do your own thing manually. To ease the process, a number of tool bars can be clicked into view or a "right click" will show the available editing tools. It is easy to switch between "edit" and "view" mode to test or check out the application before saving it.

Forms are the convenient means used to enter, view, and edit data or records. Objects, or fields, are arranged on the page in such a manner as to facilitate entry and viewing. If you use a genie/template to create the form, the fields will all be pre-arranged but, again, these can be changed to suit your needs. The editing tools are helpful and buttons, lists, drop-down lists, trees, etc can be incorporated. Another nice feature is the "tabbed" form, which allows for the creation of different pages that can be accessed by clicking the tab. This facilitates the organization of large amounts of data into a convenient, uncrowded, and pleasing arrangement. Moving between records is easily done by page-up, page-down, or by up-down buttons on one of the tool bars.

Printed results can be achieved by means of reports, which have editing tools similar to those provided for the forms. Headers and footers can be created for the report, for each page, and for sub-groups. In the detail section, data can be arranged in nearly any format to suit your needs and dressed up with color and pictures. In reports, as well as forms, data can easily be sorted and ordered as desired. Reports can be saved to four different file types, Adobe Acrobat PDF, Dynamic HTML, Rich Text, and Plain Text. The program can also create form letters (templates provided) and labels.

The programming language of Alpha Five is Xbasic which can be used to expand the capabilities of the program and has helpful tools such as Script (code) recorder, syntax checker, and debugger.

Overall, Alpha Five is a powerful program incorporating lots of tools and design aids and is worthy of consideration. On the down side, a few things were not intuitive and the program Help File could use improvement.

ALPHA Software Home site: www.alphasoftware.com

President's Message

Alan will be demonstrating the new Microsoft Windows Media Player 9.0 and Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0 at our 2 Feb Meeting General SIG.

Among the new features in Windows Media Player 9 Series is a Smart Jukebox functionality for managing digital music, new audio and video codecs and performance improvements. While leaving the interface similar to Windows Media Player 8, Microsoft has added a Premium Services tab to Windows Media Player 9 Series that allows users to access a variety of subscription services. Skins have also been added and updated, in addition to a Mini-Player Mode that shrinks Windows Media Player onto the taskbar.

Adobe Photoshop Elements 2.0 software offers the perfect combination of power and simplicity so you can do more with your photos. From quick corrections to creative editing, you can easily achieve high-quality results. Whether you use a digital camera or scan traditional photos, Photoshop Elements 2.0 makes digital imaging a breeze.

At 2:30 PM, our featured speaker will be Mladen "Mik" Mrakovcic, Chief Executive Officer of Sunbay Software USA, Inc. He will be speaking about the enterprise aspects of the software business using his experience starting a local software development company as the basis for his expertise. Check out all of the details on our new Website http://www.slobytes.org

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Microsoft BIG DAY
Thursday, February 06, 2003
Start Time: 8:00 A.M.
End Time: 4:30 P.M.

Location:
Madonna Inn
100 Madonna Road
San Luis Obispo, CA 93405

See agenda and to register, go to: http://www.msbigday.com/

Our speaker at the March 2nd meeting is Steven Boothe who will be speaking on "Internet Privacy". Steven is an Internet Communications Specialist with experience in network administration and consulting, the latter involving installing, securing and maintaining basic and extended Internet services running within a mixed Microsoft Windows NT, Linux and Unix operating environment.

As you can see on our Slobytes Website, Ralph Sutter has taken over as our Webmaster. Thank you Alan for your transition effort by stepping in to take over the Webmaster's duties when Bob Ward resigned in 2002. Although Ralph will bear the brunt of the work and be the final authority as to what gets uploaded to the Website, we are also planning to have the HTML SIG members be involved in defining its content and appearance.

Take advantage of the four learning CDs: "Learn WindowsXP, Excel, Word & PowerPoint" available for our members to check out (at Marvin's table) and use on their computers. Because of the demand, we have now two sets of the CDs.

If you have any used ink-jet printer cartridges bring them to our meeting. We collect them (at Marvin's table) and turn them over to "Make A-Wish Foundation" who generate much needed funds for their organization by refurbishing and selling them.

--Ray Miklas

Club information and meeting times

Hard Copy is a monthly publication of SLO BYTES PC Users' Group located in San Luis Obispo, California. Information in this Newsletter is derived from both our own membership and other PC User Group Newsletters. The purpose of this publication is to inform our members of meetings and provide information related to the use of PCs and various Operating Systems.

Membership: Dues are $25 per year. Full membership entitles you to our monthly newsletter, technical assistance, raffle gift drawing at the end of the meetings, and comradeships.

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 including tabs, indents, extra spaces, or highlighting. We prefer articles on disk or via email but will accept hard copies if necessary.

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General Meetings are held the 1st Sunday of each month. Our meeting location is the San Luis Obispo I.O.O.F. Hall at 520 Dana Street, SLO.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) meet at 1:00 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.

The General Meeting starts at 2:30 p.m.

Outside SIGs:

HTML-Internet SIG normally meets on Monday at 6:30 PM (following our Sunday's General Meeting) at Ralph Sutter's home in Arroyo Grande.

Linux SIG normally meets on Thursday at 6:30 PM (following our Sunday's General Meeting) at KCBX.net [a.k.a. SLONET] Training Center, 4100 Vachell Lane, SLO.

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Bill Avery (Contributing Columnist/Win95/98 SIG)
Alan Raul (General SIG/Linux SIG)
Nancy Vrooman (Refreshments)
Nate Wallenstein (Contributing Columnist)
Ken Stilts (Set-up/Clean-up)
Cliff Buttschardt (Set-up/Clean-up)
John Enos (Set-up/Clean-up)
Bill Palmerston (Set-up/Clean-up)

Treasurer's Report Dec 15, 2002 - Jan 15, 2003

Income
  Membership Dues $275.00
  Refreshments $33.70
  Dividends $5.47
Expenses
  Rent $75.00
  Refreshments $33.79

Checking Acct Balance $2,085.70
Savings Acct Balance $376.81

New Members
Bob & Linda Styerwalt

Slobytes Website www.slobytes.org

PDF version of this mailing available at:
http://www.slobytes.org/news.htm

Nate Wallenstein's
Recommended Reading

This month we won't overload you with long winded articles from other newsletters. Instead, we're going to list a few we've found and lead you to them and you can visit them or ignore them without feeling guilty.

    1. Neat Find by M.L. Giggleman of HOUSTON AREA LEAGUE OF PC USERS is at: http://www.hal-pc.org/journal/oct02/Column/eggs/eggs.html Here Mr. Giggleman starts by telling us how to find a flight simulator game buried in MS Excel 97. This is called an "Easter Egg". Mr. Giggleman says: "Want more? Then check on the ultimate Easter Egg resource at http://www.eeggs.com/

    2. CuteSITE Builder by Sara Somers of IBM/PCUG of Redding CA, at: http://www.snowcrest.net/ibmpcugr/PDF/mb2002-12.pdf This is the URL for the December 2002 issue of their "Motherboard" newsletter. You will find the article on page 6.
Ms. Somers writes about a one stop program for creating and publishing Websites. The software is quite basic and it simplifies the process for beginners. The Users' manual is short and sweet. The company furnishes on-line support.

    3. Continuing on page 6 of the IBM/PCUG, The Digital Image Guy (same link as above) discusses digital cameras. Has operated Crown Camera Company for many years and encourages people that now is the time to buy a digital camera.

    4. "Your old PC: Keep it or Dump it...", an article by Steve Bass of the Pasadena IBM Users group. The article is on Page 5 of the January 2003 issue of the Motherboard newsletter at: http://www.snowcrest.net/ibmpcugr/PDF/mb2003-01.pdf Mr. Bass concludes that you should not give it away.

    5. Tips and Tricks by Diane George of the PC Community, Hayward, CA, at: http://www.pcc.org/newsletter/02_pdf/pc-n0211.pdf This is the URL for the PCC Community Newsletter for November 2002. The article is on page 5. Ms. George starts her paper by stating that accessibility is for everybody. Windows XP comes with some features to make it better and easier use of our computers even without a disability. She discusses tuning the display, using the keyboard in lieu of a mouse to move the mouse pointer, placing a keyboard on the display and using a Narrator tool which narrates menus and contents of dialog boxes.