

safe surfing

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF
PERSONAL COMPUTER USERS
WHO FREQUENT THE INTERNET,
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON GIST
SUPPORT GROUP MEMBERS.

- FREE AUDIO
- SCAN YOUR PHOTOS
- MISCELLANEOUS TIPS
- CUSTOMER SERVICE SELF-HELP
- STUMPER QUESTION

Free (or nearly free) Audio

Audio Books I listen to audio books all the time. My current favorite format is CD primarily because my car has only a CD player, not a tape player. But, besides being far higher in audio quality than tapes, the latest



recordings on CD offer another advantage not found in audio book tapes: they can be paused or stopped and restarted precisely where you leave off, AND they can be reversed or advanced by track or just a few words or sentences. As long as you don't eject the disk, many players will start you up right where you left off. That's a tremendous advantage and one I have become so accustomed to that I try not to get any CD's or players that will not provide that feature. The newer CD productions do this in conjunction with the newer CD players (e.g., all Sony Walkman CD players I've tried and all vehicle CD players I've tried that were manufactured since about 2003 or so).

Goodwill 
Industries International, Inc.

But since audio books are very expensive, especially at

retail, I always seek lower cost options. My favorite source for newer titles are garage sales, thrift shops (national and franchise sources such as Goodwill, Deseret and local private thrift shops) and libraries. Good titles can range from free at the library to a dollar or two at garage sales and flea markets, to \$10 or



so at some thrift shops. Surprisingly, there are often pretty good prices at a retail source as well: Amazon often has very low prices, even including the tax and shipping, especially as compared to new.

In terms of quality speed and selection, an excellent source for downloading audio books is Audible.com. There are no free books here, and they're rarely discounted, but you get immediate gratification because you just download the titles to your PC.



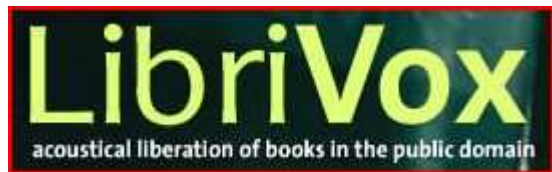
There is another new source emerging for audio books. Online web sites have been sprouting up that offer a selection of free books. Though you won't find any new or even recent commercial releases free here, the concept might provide a good selection, at least of classics, in the future:

AudioBooksForFree.com

AudioforBooksFree.com is mostly comprised of classics



in the public domain. Although most titles are free, there are paid levels of membership at AudioBooksFree that allow you to download titles at higher resolution (better audio quality) and higher speed.



LibriVox.org is a non-profit organization that uses only volunteers to record only titles in the public domain. Their very optimistic goal *"is to make all public domain books available as free audio books."* They've got some recording to do, with only 40 titles available right now.



Podiobooks.com offers free titles, mostly from new, unknown authors (who also usually narrate their own books). Podiobooks asks for donations, but right now membership and participation are free.

Audio Music Itunes is probably the best known source of online music (and they've just introduced video rentals), but **Napster** and



iTunes 7

Rhapsody are at least as good in terms of quality and selection (both very high), and most single cuts are only 99 cents apiece. Itunes is the only of the three that does not offer a monthly subscription for "all-you-can-eat" style downloads, but it is also my least favorite in terms of complexity and intrusiveness (Apple wants to be your everything forever). There are many more pay-as-you-go providers, but there are also new and inexpensive ways to get quality music



There are other ways to hear your music now. Many radio stations "stream" their programs live and save them on their sites for later playback. But some new sites have introduced their attempts to customize a radio station just for you! **Pandora.com** does an excellent job building a tremendous collection of non-stop music in response to your selection of artist and/or title. And once you register and make your selection(s) (free, by the way), the site recognizes you each time you return. So you can simply navigate to the site in one tab or window of your browser and then let your radio play while you continue to work. Very nice quality and excellent variety. There are many other similar sites if you'd like to try them too. Just a couple of examples are Radio.AOL.com, Jango.com and one site that gives you a long list of more sites:



www.RadioTower.com.

While I'm on the topic of free and useful audio sources, don't forget the "podcasts" offered nowadays by so many internet sites, radio and TV stations. That term was coined, probably, either by an iPod fan or by Apple itself, and simply denotes a media file (usually only audio but may also be video) that can be downloaded and then played by a compatible player on a PC, MP3 player or other similar device. For example, Windows Media Player, free on all Windows PCs for many years, will play most formats (e.g., MP3 or WMV files) and some DVD and CD players will play them too.



Simply navigate to any of your favorite television network or radio station internet sites, click on the link for the shows you like best and download their latest show or any other in their archives. There are some radio talk shows I like so much I used to find an excuse to drive around just so I wouldn't miss the shows. Now I can just go to any of an increasingly wide number of sites, download and listen to the shows at my leisure. Some excellent examples of these sites are http://www.npr.org/rss/podcast/podcast_directory.php www.cartalk.com www.ClarkHoward.com www.KimCommando.com <http://www.kste.com/pages/podcast.html> <http://www.foxnewsradio.com/index.htm>

Scan Your Photos



Haven't scanned all your photos yet? Don't feel bad. That's a very daunting task. And, if you're like most people, you have thousands of photos, some in scrap books, some in boxes and some on various memory cards here and there.

So the largest part of the task is to get the collection organized first. Then you'll want to decide if you will be scanning the photos yourself or farming the job out to a pro. The cost can be very high in either case: a lot of



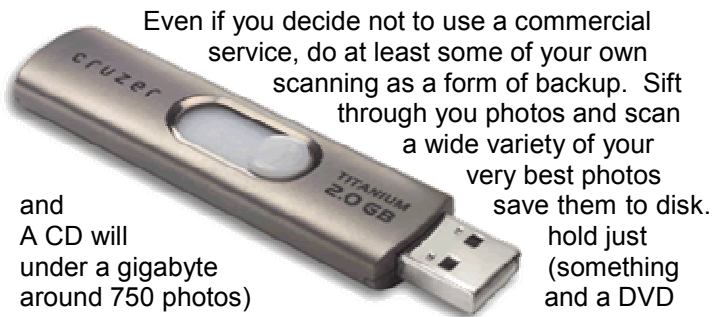
time for you or considerable money (from \$.16 to as much as \$1 per photo at many places).

There's a new option available for professional scanning: www.ScanMyPhotos.com will do them for you for only \$.05 per photo! The catch? Not much of one.



You do all the organizing and must bundle like sizes together. The scans will come back to you on a DVD in the order submitted in each bundle. You can specify what sequence you wish the bundles to be scanned, but you can't order mixed sizes. Also, since scanning is done automatically by machine, the orientation of the photos in the bundles will determine whether the photos come out right side up or sideways. All in all, this service is a great deal and the quality is reportedly high.

The company also offers higher priced packages that provide, for example, backside scanning (of the photos, not the photographer), custom books with thumbnail photos of the photos scanned to disk, color correction, multiple copies and higher than the standard 300DPI resolution.



Even if you decide not to use a commercial service, do at least some of your own scanning as a form of backup. Sift through your photos and scan a wide variety of your very best photos save them to disk. A CD will hold just under a gigabyte (something around 750 photos) and a DVD will hold more like 3500 on a single layer and 7000 on a dual layer disk. That assumes you're scanning at around 300DPI, plenty of resolution for 4x6 prints. If you're not worried about storage space (and you shouldn't be with the low cost of DVD media, hard drives and other forms of storage) go ahead and scan at 600DPI or even higher. The only problem you'll face is the amount of time many scanners take at higher resolutions. Then, whether you scan to several CDs, DVDs, a thumb drive or an external hard drive, make copies and store at

least one of the copies of the media "off site," outside your home someplace like a safety deposit box, a relative's home or your place of business.

Miscellaneous Tips

I'm no Heloise, but I've found a few good tips for you this month.

Unusual Income Tax Deduction:

Did you know that there is going to be a one-time Federal Income Tax deduction for 2008 of your real estate taxes (or \$500 per person/\$1000 per couple, whichever is less)? It only applies to those of you unlucky enough not to be able to itemize your deductions because you are lucky enough not to have a mortgage. I found that hidden in a local newspaper article recently and nowhere else! I checked it out and am happy to report it is valid (but you do have to claim the deduction, so don't forget to do that, or remind your accountant):

<http://turbotax.intuit.com/support/kb/tax-content/tax-tips/6395.html>



Big Brother is Getting Closer:

If you are a little bit paranoid about how your activities can be tracked (always a good idea really), these tips will make sense to you:



1. When you apply for a grocery store "loyalty card," don't use your full name. Use "Barry" or "Preferred Customer." That's because lists of loyalty cardholder names are being sold to major companies that track your purchases and try to target you in their marketing efforts.

2. Similarly, if you use an E-Z Pass card to avoid lines at tollbooths, consider removing it periodically to avoid being tracked by law enforcement. The rumor is (I have not verified this, but it is technologically possible) that some law enforcement jurisdictions are actually accusing drivers of speeding based upon the time between E-Z Card recording points and issuing subpoenas based upon the information from those trackings.



Retrieve That Letter: This one won't be used very much, but I wasn't aware it was even possible: if you realize too late that you mailed a letter you didn't intend to mail and you wish to reclaim it, there's actually a form for that! Just go to the Post Office as soon after mailing it as possible and fill out a *Sender's Application for Recall of Mail*. Obviously

the sooner you file the form the better your chances of retrieving the letter.

Stretch Before or After or F'getaboutit:

Until very recently the common wisdom was that we should stretch before exercising to reduce muscle soreness and, more importantly, to preclude injury. Then the advice changed and very firmly recommended we stretch AFTER exercise, and simply warm up the muscles to be used before by, say walking a bit if you are about to run or bicycle, or hitting the ball a few times before engaging in a racket sport. That is the advice I was about to disperse this month until I read the following 3-6 year old studies that, paraphrased, says "All bets are off and more study is needed before making recommendations:"



<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/325/7362/468>

<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1250267>

And although there are very passionate and recent sources that maintain stretching after exercise is helpful (<http://www.emaxhealth.com/21/174.html>), there are at least two other studies ongoing that may finally give us real direction:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/07/health/nutrition/07Best.html?partner=rssnyt>

Customer Service Self-Help

Forgive my pontificating, but remember that article I wrote a short time ago entitled "Something in the Air" and an earlier one called "Before you Press Send?" Well here I go again.



I seem to be hearing complaints from more and more people about their experiences with various companies' customer service. That would not be so surprising if my

experience were consistent, but it is not! In fact, whether my issue is out-sourced to India (that's very obvious, isn't it? "Bob" speaks with a very heavy Indian accent in English that's so proper it's almost impossible to understand!) or handled right here at home by a real "Bob" or "LaShondra," I have never been happier with the quality of service I've been getting recently!



I can say that I have had extensive recent experience with Dell, DISH TV, AT&T, to name a few well-known companies. Coincidentally, these are the very same companies about which I've heard complaints. And I think I may have thought of a few reasons that I am enjoying my experience while others are lamenting theirs. First of all, I **expect** (and sometimes look forward) to talking with "Bob" or "Kim" from India. In fact, I kind of giggle when they identify themselves and say something like, "Yeah, right, Kim, and this is Suresh speaking!" It never fails to get a laugh and we both begin our experiences on the right foot.



Now I'm not trying to kid anyone here, I don't always start off in good humor, having had to wade through poorly constructed menu selections and left on hold through overbearing elevator music. And when I end up

in India there will ALWAYS be at least one time when I absolutely CANNOT understand something the representative has said. But when that happens, I very politely and patiently say something like "You know, I'm certain this is my fault but I cannot understand what you're saying. Would you please spell that word (or sentence or paragraph) for me?" And, when I ask for that kind of help, never once have I found the representative to lose patience with me. Instead, they have always taken whatever time necessary to communicate their advice.

Another thing I try to do before contacting Customer Service anywhere is to research all of the troubleshooting tips and FAQs (Frequently asked Questions) available on the company's web site. Then, upon first contact, I briefly summarize what I've tried, read or couldn't find.

On those unusual occasions when I've encountered a snotty or inept representative, I will not hesitate to ask for a supervisor. But, again, I will do so apologetically and

politely. One friend recently reported that he had an AT&T Customer Service Representative hang up on him because he felt the word “crap” (as in “I shouldn’t have to put up with this kind of crap.”) was abusive. You can avoid that only by keeping your cool. Because, if you think you’re upset and stressed now, imagine having to wait through the entire, menu selection, queue and explanation process after a hang-up!

So, to summarize, when you call customer service for help, try this:

1. Maintain your sense of humor and perspective,
2. Be prepared for the call.
3. Ask for a supervisor (or elevation to a higher “tier”) if needed.
4. Keep your cool (that might really be a repeat of #1, but it bears repeating).

Stumper Question

Last month I asked if you knew how to go about resolving a common problem: you legally purchased Microsoft Office and installed it on your computer. But then you changed the hard drive, trashed, gave away or sold the original computer and you want to install your original Office product onto your new hard drive or computer. But Microsoft’s activation rules keep telling you can only install and activate one copy of the software on one



computer. How do you get Microsoft to realize you simply want to reinstall the software you have already paid for on your new machine/hard drive?



There is still a lot of disagreement about exactly what Microsoft will allow. For example, many people believe it is legal for two installations (one on a desktop and one on a laptop), but Microsoft says otherwise:

<http://support.microsoft.com/kb/300273/>

<http://www.microsoft.com/piracy/mpa.aspx>

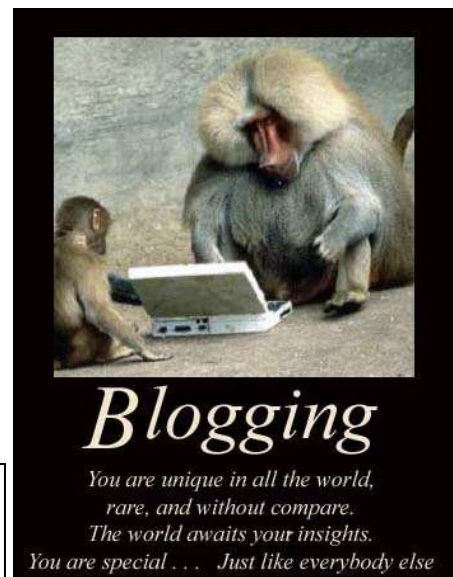
When you install your software (in my case Office XP) onto your new machine you get the activation warning that says something like “You have 48 more chances to activate this software before we’ll storm your home....” Then when you try to activate it via the internet (the preferred way) the result is a warning that their records show installation on another computer already and that only one computer may have the software installed.

Despite their adherence to a very restrictive policy in writing, there seems to be tacit acknowledgement that installation and activation on two machines is reasonable. I say this because I’ve discovered that it is pretty simple to activate a product multiple times. All you have to do is use the alternate option of activating the product, calling the customer service number. It is an automated voice and/or key-press process and very painless. I expected I’d have to offer something or someone up for hostage while swearing to uninstall my original installation of the product. That was not the case and I was quite pleasantly surprised. It does seem unconscionable, though, that Microsoft does not make this capability more widely known and easier to discover. Perhaps they really HAVE become too big for their own good, as many have claimed over the years.

Next month, I’ll tell you why Vista doesn’t completely suck. I discovered a real improvement in the second machine I purchased with the operating system preinstalled. The first was an Acer with an early, though fully upgraded and patched version of Vista preinstalled and it didn’t overwhelm me, to say the least. The second machine is a nice Dell laptop with Vista installed and it works beautifully! I also found a new feature in the system that I really like! It’s a replacement for the old “Print



Screen” feature used to capture the image on your display for printing or manipulation. However, sometimes the new feature is hidden (not turned on) in Vista and, even when it is on, there is no automatic shortcut to the program. I’ll show you how to create a shortcut to that or any other program in Windows next month.



Blogging

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rare, and without compare.
The world awaits your insights.
You are special . . . Just like everybody else*

Barry Codron, a retired U.S. Air Force pilot, lives with his wife and doggie, near his children and grandchildren and their doggies, in the Sacramento area. He enjoys writing and consulting in areas including technology and music, among other fields that pique his interest from time to time. He welcomes your questions, comments, ideas or corrections at barry.mart@sbcglobal.net.