

safe surfing

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

- FREE CELL PHONE SERVICES
- MORE MEDICAL SITES
- FATHER'S DAY FOLLOW-UP
- WEB SITE FINDS
- SOMETHING IN THE AIR?
- STUMPER QUESTION



Free Cell Phone Services

Obviously cell phones are becoming a greater part of our lives. I

have spent a lot of time examining cell phones, accessories and services for this newsletter, and I am always looking for more. Here a few new services I thought I should share with you. And they're, all together now, FREE!

The first one is very similar to the **800-YellowPages** I described in a recent issue, but there are differences: Not only are there no fees, but there are also no ads related to Google's new information service, **800-Goog-411**. Better yet, this service automatically connects you unless you ask for "details" (so you can write the information down) or "text message" (meaning you want them to text you with the information). Advantages: free, ad-free and connects for you. Disadvantage: business numbers and addresses only, not residential.



If you want a residence, either **800-YellowPages** or **800-Free411** will do the trick for you, with brief ads, the only

(slight) disadvantage. There are other similar services too, but so far this one seems to be the best.

Another service, **1-800-555-Tell**, is more commercially oriented, getting you information (text or voice) regarding businesses by name or by category. You can also get sports, movies, horoscope and scads of other information from the service.

One of the most amazing and promising services to come around is **800-2ChaCha**. The service is designed to answer virtually ANY question!

Understandably, the answers are quite variable in terms of accuracy and relevance, but the answers come pretty fast. You get a confirmation message in about 30 seconds and a full answer in a minute or two more. The

Answers on the GO!

- 1 Text your question to ChaCha at **242242** on your mobile device.
- 2 A ChaCha Guide sends you the answer!

Try it for Free!

amateur researchers that actually field your questions are paid 20 cents per answer and can be ranked so that only the most reliable workers are retained.

Don't you hate when you come up with that great idea while you're on the road or somewhere else without a notepad or voice recorder handy? Well you can now rely on **866-Jott123**, your own personal stenographer! This is the only service I've mentioned that requires you to sign up and, if applicable, to unblock your wireless service's premium message delivery. Jott.com also provides an address book so you can send audio messages to anyone else or to groups of people at one time.



A similar program, **866-9Reqall**, lets you dictate reminders to yourself via email, text message or instant message. I haven't tried all of these yet, but **866-9Reqall**, unlike the others, is said to have problems in terms of voice recognition. Surely they will improve, IF they survive. But they won't survive unless they're good enough to attract users.



E-Trade has just begun offering **E-Trade Mobile Pro** for checking stock statistics

and actually trading on cell phones. Anyone with wireless web access is already able to do that, but this process, designed specifically for cell phones, makes it far simpler and more secure. Initially only Blackberry phones will be able to use the system, but other phones will follow.

As gas prices go crazy, having real-time information regarding the lowest local prices becomes even more important. To that end, a number of web sites offer their assistance, so I thought it was about time those sites offer easy mobile phone interface. I wasted a lot of time discovering that the survey I'd intended to do on this subject for this month's newsletter was going to be a failure. The three sites below claim to allow you to check by city or zip code either at home or on your



web-enabled cell phone for the best price:

<http://www.gasbuddy.com/> (or gasbuddytogo.com for mobile use)

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

http://www.motortrend.com/gas_prices/index.html

GasBuddy was the first to introduce this idea and is the only one I could get to work at all on my cell phone, but the information seems to be inferior to the other two sites. On my cell phone screen, **GasBuddy** only offered me one station in my zip code, and it turned out NOT to be the lowest price, even though it was for the same brand as the lowest price I finally did find. That indicates to me that they are ad-supported, something they claim not to be!

The ease and accuracy using **FuelMeUp** at home made me expect a similar experience on my wireless phone, but I was greatly disappointed. I could not get it to work at all on the phone. Likewise, the Motor Trend offering was clear and accurate (though slow) at home, but completely unusable on the phone.

Since getting information from all three sites was impossible on the phone, I looked into a widely recommended alternative. Supposedly, if you send a text message to Gas@fuelgo.com with your zip code in the subject or heading, they will text you back with the best price in your area – NOT! Their site is down, perhaps for the count. So keep tuned in for future reports on this topic, because it's a definite area of need with virtually no effective solution.

More Medical Sites

"The Healthy Skeptic" by Robert J Davis highlights a few web sites that you should bookmark.

PubMed.gov allows you to search for virtually any health-article by title, author or publication.

HealthNewsReview.org analyzes and reports on the accuracy and completeness of news reports on research and study findings.

Quackwatch.org is kind of like a **Snopes.com** for health issues. Their mission is to identify and report on "frauds, myths, fads, fallacies and misconduct."

MedicalConsumers.org is kind of a **ConsumerReports.org** for medical issues. Their reach



is very broad and relevant. While checking the site out I found very interesting information there that I was wondering about regarding the recent Vytorin study report.

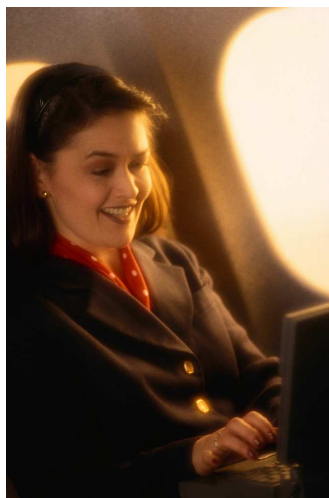
Fathers' Day Follow-up

Wow!!! It apparently had absolutely nothing to do with what I wrote last month about **Father's Day Ideas** because only one of my daughters seems to read this newsletter regularly and she read it late last month. But I just had one of the greatest and busiest Father's Days I've had in recent years! All of my girls were here (I have three angels, just like Charlie), and I got the number one item on the list I suggested in the article: the Wii Fit! That was from my wife though, so I'm sure it was aimed right at my increasingly enhanced belly. What a kick though (literally and figuratively)! And if the raw health and fun aspects of the game aren't enough, here's some more incentive (why every guy should buy his girlfriend one): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v31qxrXsxv0>

I also got something I wouldn't have thought would thrill me as much, but it did – a beautiful new barbeque grill in yard decor-matching, durable metallic porcelain color with every imaginable accessory. My only out-of-town daughter and son-in-law extended their stay and gave me a double whammy of a celebration, complete with grandkids, just the kind of fun I love. And it actually kept me away from the computer (as much as anything can). Even if I'm not any thinner after having used the Wii Fit, I can at least blame the great time I've had this Father's Day for my skinnier newsletter this month.

Web Site Finds

Soaring prices, especially for fuel, have caused airlines to tighten their belts. Convenient and economical flights are harder and harder to find (Redeye flights seem to be nonexistent), we're being charged for even our first piece of luggage on **American** and **United**, and we need to pay for anything beyond a bag of chips or peanuts on all domestic flights! This means



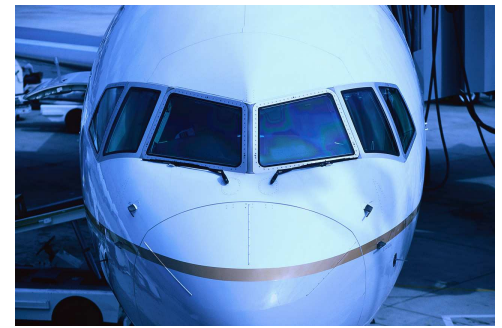
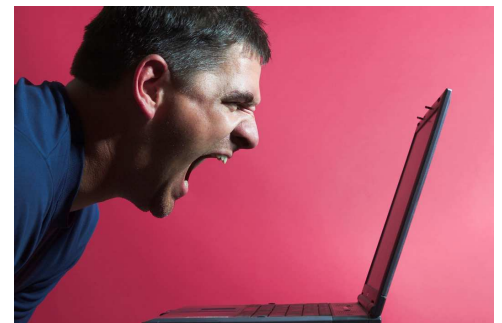
WAR! Remember the sites I described a few months ago like **Kayak** and **Sidestep**? Well they and the individual airlines' offer email alerts on special deals. You would be surprised how deeply some of those deals are discounted. But you must be aware of them to benefit. Sign up for those alerts!

Further, look carefully at the rate levels offered. Many airlines offer senior rates, but some also have other special rates for groups such as government, military, children and anyone who can schedule a flight a certain amount of time in advance. Finally, some airlines do not make their rates available to travel site "aggregators" such as **Sidestep** and **Kayak**. Most notably, you must specifically navigate to the **Southwest Airlines** site to see their rates. If they fly to a destination you seek they almost always seem to offer the lowest overall travel time and a very competitive, if not the lowest rate. Also remember to factor in things like their not charging for either the first or the second checked bag. That can add up! Sure, **Southwest** can be a little Spartan and a "cattle call," but so can the other, more pricey airlines, especially if you run into overworked and/or stressed gate and flight personnel.

A couple of new travel oriented sites deserve mention: www.CruiseCompete.com and www.ResortCompete.com. They both operate somewhat like PriceLine.com in that you describe your preferences and price range, but then interested agents contact you if they can serve you

Something in the Air?

Man, if there's not something in the air lately, besides burning embers and smoke in California, then I guess I'm just losing it!



I have had an unusually high number of virtually “rabid” emails from casual acquaintances, close friends and relatives alike! Some have been in response to pieces I have



probably too cavalierly forwarded to everyone on my long distribution list, but some are independent emails, and many have one thing in common: they don't sound at all like the person who sent them! That is, the words, phrases and tone would almost definitely not have been used if the person had said them rather than written them!

So I am reminded of and prompted to repeat the precaution given to us by Mary Jane Pulley and Jane Hilberry, authors of “Get Smart! How E-mail Can Make or Break Your Career and Your Organization:” **“Would you say it face to face?”** And please remember that the reader of an email cannot hear your tone (tongue-in-cheek, poking fun, etc.). They can only read the words you say and try to derive your meaning and any related implications from them. Email is VERY dangerous and can ruin otherwise healthy relationships.

My recent experience with these unusually harsh emails also reminds me of the importance of another solid practice, especially when forwarding emails, and even more especially when they refer to anything to which people seem to be particularly sensitive lately. (My father used to warn me to avoid discussions of religion, sex and politics. Nowadays I find there is virtually no danger discussing the former two, but IMMENSE jeopardy in any discussion of politics! It amazes me that we are both so polarized AND so emotionally invested in matters of U.S. politics.) Anyhow, the practice that is too often ignored when forwarding items online is to check them out as urban legends or hoaxes. If it sounds the least bit suspicious, it's probably “horse-hockey.” But it's quite easy to check out by simply entering a few key words or a phrase into your favorite urban legend debunker. My favorite, as I've said many times before, is www.snopes.com. They are always thorough and virtually incontrovertible. Even though they seem to me to have a very liberal, almost ACLU-like, bent, I trust their fact-finding process without exception.



So please, help me create a kinder, gentler internet! Can't we all just get along?

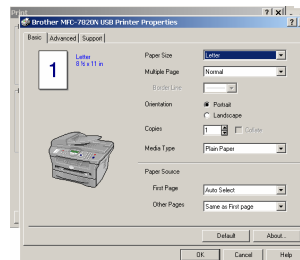
Stumper Question

Last month I asked if you knew how to streamline the process of printing with a different set of printer features. That's really a very simple (embarrassingly

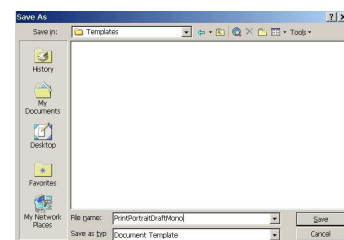
so) process, but it's worth describing because it's such a significant time saver. Just open a document and set the printer settings the way you want them (e.g.,



portrait or landscape, mono or color, high, medium or draft quality, etc.) and then save that document with a name you will remember as a “template.” You can also actually save it as a template file with the “Save as” function in Windows



programs (Word and Excel). That way, whenever you open, say “Word Draft Landscape”, your printer will automatically be set with your desired parameters. Obviously you can save any other aspects in the template as well such as a greeting, a signature block or any other text. You can build as many templates as you like, each with different characteristics that suit your specific need at any time.



For next month ponder this: You now have a gazillion photos on your hard drive with photos from various vacations and special events all mixed together. You plan to organize them sometime soon into discrete folders that identify the occasion(s), but you'd like the individual photo files to also have names that roughly identify the picture, not DSC00389 or some such. How can you make XP help you do that?

Anyone interested in starting a Photo of the Month feature here? We see a lot of interesting things while surfing the net, and I know much of it is not fit to print. But some of it can be very cute, if not downright riveting. Here, I'll start with this submission. Let's say, for starters, that it has to be something you took or found, but not on a “Best of...” site.



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.