

safe surfing

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

- QUALITY CONTROL FOR CHARITIES
- QUESTIONS, WE GET QUESTIONS
- MORE MEDICAL SITES
- WEB SITE FINDS
- STUMPER QUESTION

Quality Control Your Charities

Have you ever wanted an easy way to check out your charities? It's easy to just call Goodwill or the Salvation Army to come pick up your cast-offs, and there are lots of solid organizations out there. But are some more deserving or harder working than others? And you want to be even more careful with cash or other forms of donations. Here are a few sites that can help you in your research, but your heart and personal interests will be your best guide in identifying the organizations you wish to examine further.



WWW.Give.org is now part of The Better Business Bureau at WWW.BBB.org/charity, but both addresses will get you to the right place. You can examine aspects such as the charities' financial information, any complaints filed (if they exceed a level the BBB considers significant) and other issues. But don't look for a "rating" per se. The BBB is simply trying to use its business "rating" model for charities and, except for extremely notorious organizations that have gathered significant numbers of complaints, I'm not sure their listings are very helpful.

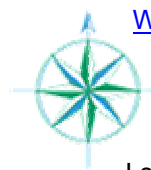
AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF PHILANTHROPY

Helping you give wisely to charity.

WWW.CharityWatch.org is a site created by the American Institute of Philanthropy. You will find actual ratings there



and the site is easier to use, but there seems to be less information, both in terms of volume and depth.



WWW.CharityNavigator.org is even easier to use,

CHARITY NAVIGATOR
Your Guide To Intelligent Giving

and I like their rating system, but some charities

I searched for there are not included in their listings.

WWW.GuideStar.org is another source and it's probably about the best of the bunch for more "casual" or "lite" givers such as myself.



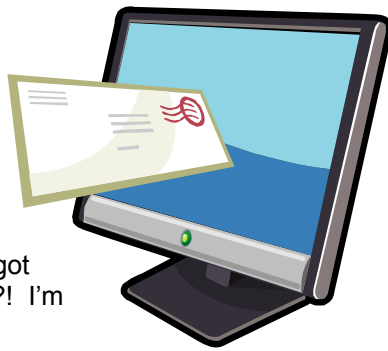
GUIDESTAR

But you can't beat the detail at the BBB site

and it is very impressive if you are planning a particularly large donation. (I just have a little trouble with the concept of BBB members paying for membership and then being rated. It's always seemed to be a conflict of interest, even though I know their policy is to remove their accreditation from members who receive a bad rating.)

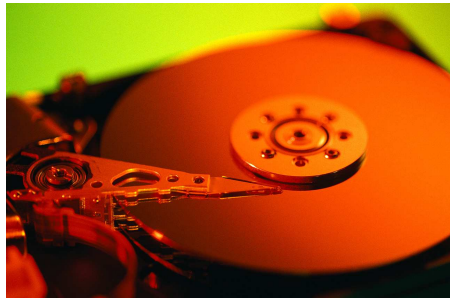
Questions, we get questions...!

I can't believe it! I actually got some questions last month?! I'm so excited!



Hard Disk Wiper

One person wanted to know if I could recommend a program to securely rid his hard disk of all of his files before discarding it. There are really many programs that will do this for you, but here are a few free ones (my favorite way to go). The main concern, in terms of security, is to use a program that conforms to the US Department of Defense clearing and sanitizing standard DoD 5220.22-M, preferably using Gutmann's data destruction method, and all of these do that:



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- I L-Soft's Free offering Active@ Kill Disk: http://www.download.com/Active-Kill-Disk-Hard-Drive-Eraser/3000-2092_4-10073508.html?tag=lst-1&cdlPid=10852099
- DBAN: Darik's Boot and Nuke: <http://dban.sourceforge.net/>
- Heidi's Eraser: <http://www.heidi.ie/eraser/>
- This one is good for "shredding" individual files or folders without having to format the whole drive - http://www.download.com/File-Shredder/3000-2144_4-10662831.html?tag=lst-1&cdlPid=10662832

CDs vs. DVDs

Nowadays almost everyone has both a DVD burner and a CD burner. Since the DVD disks have a whole lot more room than a CD, why not always just burn your stuff to DVDs? Well, for one thing, blank DVDs are more expensive. If that isn't enough reason for you, ripping DVDs is also harder to do. Copying music or data to a CD is often a simple "drag and drop" process.



Generally you will want to reserve the burning of a DVD to times when you have a lot of data, like a large backup of files, a movie or the need for very high quality and

large files (graphics, photography, audio or video). A CD will hold no more than 650-700 megabytes (think in terms of 700 million characters, including spaces and pixels, whether blank or filled). A normal DVD holds 4.4 gigabytes (enough for a 2 hour movie) and a dual layer, double-sided DVD can hold 15.9 gigabytes (enough for 8 hours of movies with surround sound!)

So if you are just making copies of your photos, data or music and you don't need more than about 650MB of space, use a CD.

Confused about the disks that say "audio" or "music" as compared to those that either say nothing or say "data?" I wouldn't worry about the distinction. There's a lot of discussion and disagreement, but I've personally detected a bit of difference. The cheapest you can find, but keep in mind that some off-sometimes inferior brands in compatibility and reliability, so buy the off-brand only if you're saving a lot of money AND when you have an absolute return guarantee. Generally I'd go with the very cheapest name brand (e.g., Memorex, TDK, etc.).



Now, how about the difference between CDRW and CDR or DVDRW and DVDR? The concept is that you can continually reuse the "RW" (read-write) products, but can only write once and read from the "R" products. And the "RW" products are, again, more costly than their write-once counterparts. As tempting as it is to get the RW disks, in actual practice I've found them to be a waste of money for a few reasons: First of all, the RW disks seem to me to be the least reliable. That is, if you're going to have trouble with a disk, it's probably going to be Read/Write disk. And throwing those away when they're defective hurts more than throwing away the cheaper ones.

Windows Defender

Another question involved this new program.

Her internet experience has slowed to the speed of grass growing.



If you have AVG installed and activated (i.e. have it running so



that it automatically scans any incoming files or programs), then your most important risk is covered. Spy ware and ad ware can also hurt your computer, but not to the same degree or in the same irretrievable way that a virus can. So it is certainly a good idea to install good spy ware and ad ware protection. Windows Defender, free with Vista and a free download if you have XP Service Pack 2 or later, is such a program. But there are also many other similar, good programs, like Spybot search and Destroy for example. So if you believe Defender is causing trouble, which has occurred to others, then replace it with another program like Spybot.

There is a lot of disagreement on this point, but I actually like Defender. Some despise it and blame it for many of their problems. The most likely cause of a problem is the use of too many protection programs (like MacAfee and/or Norton AND Windows Defender all working simultaneously). AVG and a spy ware program is PLENTY. But AVG, or some other antivirus program, and Windows Defender together should certainly not give you any trouble. Norton and MacAfee are notorious memory hogs though. Using either along with another antivirus program will almost definitely cause problems.

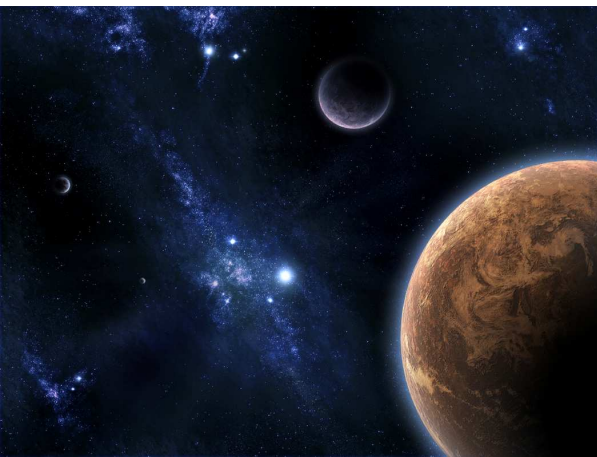
More Medical Sites

Here's another great site for people addicted to shopping, especially comparison shopping:



WWW.HospitalCompare.HHS.gov has thorough information on over 2500 hospitals across the Nation. Most people expect our government to help us make informed decisions, and this is an excellent example of our civil servants earning their keep by "telling it like it is!" I'm very impressed with the site's candor and thoroughness.

I may have mentioned this observation before, but my favorite-of-all-time science fiction story (it may have been a novel, it might have been a short story;



I keep thinking Frederic Brown, but I see nothing similar in his bibliography) painted a future wherein all of civilization became a single entity...a ball of energy without human form. The entity somehow consisted of all the minds that originally existed independently, with their own opinions and contributions, but the key difference was that the very second any development occurred anywhere in the world (or universe?) everyone would essentially experience it or know about it instantaneously and simultaneously, deriving all appropriate and necessary lessons. (Maybe it wouldn't be as much fun to live and learn that way, but it would be a lot more efficient.) It dawned on me some time ago that the author was really forecasting the internet.



And here's just another example of how beneficial and productive the internet can be. I know I've highlighted WebMD before, but their "community" exhibits all the very finest attributes of the internet. In a very short visit to WWW.WebMD.com/community I saw people generously sharing their concerns and experiences on everything from Adult ADHD to Wii Fit Yoga!

Also on WebMD, you can literally ask the experts at www.webmd.com/community/experts. If someone else in the community has not already laid the groundwork for you, go ahead and shoot off a query!

Web Site Finds

www.PublicSurplus.com Not very big or active yet, and mostly dated stuff, but promising. Keep checking back.



www.GovtDeals.com Has considerably more items and activity, but they focus on very large lots (computers, electronics, etc.) and other large items (cars, houses and boats), though there are a few smaller items too (e.g. jewelry).



GovDeals

www.Bid4Assets.com Apparently just starting out, they're very light in the offerings category. I do admire their hutzpah, though: they have a catalog that includes categories for everything you've ever heard of! If they ever get anything to auction off, it'd be an interesting place to browse anyhow.





PROPERTY ROOM.COM

Police Auctions Online...and MORE!

www.PropertyRoom.com For fun, activity and variety, this site wins my vote. Everything from Cars, boats and large lots of electronics, to individual computer items and jewelry. And the site is very easily and rapidly navigated through (VERY important when trying to shop efficiently).

Warning: these sites haven't been around long enough to instill tremendous confidence in their reliability or credibility. There is no eBay- or Amazon-style feedback system to rely on, so only time will tell. Also, always read the fine print. In the case of GovDeals, all sales are final with no recourse. At Bid4Assets certain returns are accepted under specific circumstances, and PropertyRoom charges a 15% restocking fee.

One of my favorite celebrity teams is Click & Clack, the brothers Tom and Ray Magliozzi. They started on PBS, are nationally syndicated in newspapers, and have just



started their own animated TV series. humor is and their sound. One suggestion from their most newspaper



Their engaging advice is excellent comes recent

article: If you are in need of a trustworthy mechanic, go to WWW.CarTalk.com and enter your zip code in the "Find a mechanic" block. The brothers simply collect and report on the comments and surveys submitted to them on the mechanics they visited. So, as they warn in their disclaimer, it's always very possible that "some dirtball" out there has recommended his own or his buddy's shop, so keep alert to that possibility.

Stumper Question



Last month I asked if you knew how to easily organize your photos with descriptive titles that identify the occasion(s) (not simply

the default name DSC000389 or some such). Here's how you can make XP help you do that:

Unless you really have a lot of time on your hands, I doubt you want to go through the massive folders that contain your vacation photos, say that one to Europe, and rename them Europe_1.jpg, Europe_2.jpg, and so on down the line. If you're running Windows XP or Vista on your computer, there's an easy fix. Simply apply this "hack" to quickly give a meaningful label to every picture in the folder.



- First, open the folder and select View > Thumbnails.
- Highlight all the files you want to have a common name by clicking on the last picture in the folder you want to rename, holding down the Shift key, and clicking on the first picture; this will select them all.
- Right-click the first photo, and select "Rename" from the drop-down menu.

Windows will highlight the filename for the first photo, enabling you to give it a descriptive name, say "Africa08." After you type in the name, click the white space outside of the photo and watch as Windows applies the name with a sequential number to each picture in the folder.



Next month I'll tell you how to go about resolving a common problem: you

legally purchased Microsoft Office and installed 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 or hard drive?



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 and comments at barry.mart@sbglobal.net.