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MEGAPHONE

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTRAL MARYLAND USER GROUP

President's Message

from Mike Kerwin

25, 50, 100 Gimme an Antique

This month's column is inspired by a just-passed birthday for a digital media we all use routinely – the CD/compact disk (formally the Compact Disk-Digital Audio system) and its offspring the various flavors of DVD. According to CNN this media was born on 17 August 1982 when mass production began in Germany with Richard Strauss' Alpine Symphony. It would be 2 years later that CD-ROMs were introduced to the world of digital computing. The patents underlying CD technology are owned by Royal Philips Electronics, NV and the Sony Corp which both contributed to the development of the entire system from scratch. In writing the audio specifications for this new media, Polygram was also a major participant.

CDs were originally developed as a replacement for vinyl recordings of music as a more permanent method to preserve the clarity and content of this popular analog content – music to most ears. Prior to this time music recording used mechanical reproduction means very similar in concept to the original foil cylinders developed by Thomas Edison around 1877 and later improved upon by Alexander Graham Bell to use wax as a medium. Such is the history of technology where one new item begets another and another and so on down the line. The recording cylinder had a life span of about 50 years (from 1880 to 1929) after which the disk form took over for about 75 years in one form or another.

Currently that format is giving way rapidly to MP3 files stored in solid state memory and hard drives.

But back to more recent history: the first important step was the publication of the "Red Book" of standards and patent rights in 1980. Philips had developed the hardware aspects of recording and playback while Sony had developed the digital encoding for smooth playback. That

had to be an interesting venture into the unknown, but they saw the convergence of new technology and a consumer need to be profitably met. The system they set out to replace involved expensive and sensitive hardware devices (turntables with mechanical reading devices) which created sounds, and noise, from physical contact with rotating vinyl disks bearing 2 channels of information pressed into a spiral groove. The physical contact issue was a really touchy point for purists interested in accurate, noise-free reproduction of recording artists great and small; this was due to the friction of passage of increasingly lighter weight needles marring the surface of the relatively pliable vinyl.

The next step into the digital age required the standardization of the VTOC (volume table of contents) for CD-ROMS to allow wide dispersion of the new media – no Beta vs VHS war for this media. Because of this standard the same disk can be read by any operating system utilizing a standard mechanical interface. Surprisingly this step occurred relatively quickly, 1984, as the anticipated revenue streams seemed sufficient to provide profits to all of the players. This was followed by more standards for a common CD-ROM format. I had long heard about this as being the High Sierra standard, but my research provided the background story of the big meeting held in Lake Tahoe in 1986 at the High Sierra Hotel. At this meeting, representatives of the hardware manufacturers, the PC industry, and software publishers got their heads together and agreed on a uniform standard. This was later replaced by the ISO-9660 standard, which incorporates some minor modifications to the High Sierra



Next General Meeting

Our speaker will be Ms. Donni Dingman from Verizon, presenting on Verizon's FIOS system.

Wednesday, September 19, 7:30 pm.....Florence Bain Senior Center

Next Windows SIG Meeting

Topic: More on Tuesday Night Special

Tuesday, September 25, 7:00 pm.....Florence Bain Senior Center

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standard.

So what, you may ask, does this have to do with the title of my article? The answer is that the lifespan of technology items is brief. While most historical objects are not considered antiques until they are at least 100 years old, and in some cases the term is applied to objects more than 1000 years old, but time marches to a different drummer in the metal/mechanical age into which we were born. Since metal objects tend to corrode and fail to function we have allowed some such devices to be considered antique at age 50. For really complex objects the bar has been pushed even closer as automobiles qualify for this term after only 25 years. So I guess it is not out of line for me to believe that, at age 25, the CDs I have been using for so very long have now qualified for the category of Antique, paralleling the way their owner now qualifies for senior discounts.

CDs have served faithfully and will continue to do so till the glue holding them together lets go, but current technology which accommodates rapid file transfers over the Internet by cable or wireless methods to storage media of our choosing have left the CD in the dust. Its last gasp may be HD movies, but the looming format war may cause so much disruption as to hasten the demise of the disk form altogether.

Browser Problem

On an unrelated topic, I've lately been experiencing an annoying browser (IE7) problem. I have installed the Google toolbar on my PC as I like the convenience of its search capabilities; however I have come to find it is responsible for a current pest. The problem shows up when I "click through" from one webpage to another hot linked to it. If the new page does not load very quickly, I am re-directed to a Google/Dell search page of suggested alternatives to the page I want. I think the banner/moving image ads are somehow responsible for the delay and re-direction. If I hit the back button I can usually get to my desired page; then I have to scroll down quickly and hit the "Print" button to grab the content I wanted in the first place. Sometimes it has required several iterations of this process to get the information I set out to find (such as for my column above). I had asked for help here at work with this issue, but it apparently does not qualify as a significant problem.

Today I dug further into this problem by clicking on the "What is This?" link on the page of suggestions. This new page indicates two reasons for popping up: "The web address you typed did not resolve correctly." Or "You typed a keyword query..." Usually the former is the culprit with the ads bearing responsibility as the more animated ones take longer to load (the price we pay for free things!).

Reading this second page more thoroughly I discovered that the Suggestion page was an

independent part of Google Toolbar. It can be removed with the "Add/Remove Programs" part of the Control Panel. If you encounter this pest and wish to be rid of it, look for one of the following apps and delete it from this part of the Control Panel: "URL Assistant", "GoogleAFE", or, more recently, "Browser Address Error Redirector". After I performed this bit of virtual surgery, the problem appears to have gone away.

Thanks

On to business: We offer our thanks to Mr Youlong Yang for his digital images of China and his talk on how he processes his images to obtain commercial grade pictures to publish. These machines we work with have some remarkable capabilities.

For September we may have a mystery speaker (or not) as we have not lined up anyone by the time I am writing this column. We still need someone to coordinate our Program area and this is the latest symptom of the effect it is having on our operation.

That's 30,

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Upcoming Meetings and Help Needed

As was announced previously, Andrew Rein has stepped down from his job as Program Director. So CMUG is in need of someone who can coordinate presentations for our general meetings.

The presentations are an important part of the educational mission of our user group. The Program Director acts as a central coordinator, and as liaison between the group and the speaker. So, this is an important job. On the other hand, I don't think it's particularly time-consuming; we only have 11 presentations a year, after all, and most of the communication can be done via email. If you have questions about the workload or are otherwise interested, you might speak with Andrew (or one of the other officers) at the meeting.

October 17: To be determined

November 21: To be determined

December 19: Annual Holiday Meeting and Potluck Supper

Deals from the DealsGuy

by Bob Click, Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

Feedback

I heard from several readers who said they have been successfully traveling with only a “special” flash drive for some time. I hadn’t seen a review on this, or read about it as a meeting presentation last year if they were available? I read a lot, especially the UG newsletters I get. I only learned about the USB U3 drives last spring when I purchased a San Disk Flash Drive that I thought was a bargain. When I plugged it into the USB port just to take a look, I thought it was installing something on my HD. I was upset and wanted to know what was going on without my permission. Then I read the enclosed folder about the software preinstalled on that “U3” drive, and other software available on their Web site for it. I was confused and tried unsuccessfully to learn more about it. Around the first of the year was the first I read a review, but without understanding it, I was still confused. Last month I included the article about that topic because I know I’m not the only person behind on new technology knowledge.

Let’s Look at the Pluses!

I reviewed Microsoft Money a few years ago and started actually using it when my favorite money program, “Managing Your Money,” turned to providing software for banks. I have differences with some Microsoft policies, such as Genuine Advantage, and their product activation process, but when it comes to MS Money, that tech support is the best in the business. Each version I have used came with three years of support via an 800 number. They try hard to answer your questions and do not speak broken English. So far, I’ve talked to tech support in Newfoundland three times, and they have resolved my questions, followed by an email thanking me for using MS Money and saying that if the issue was still not resolved, they are there to clear it up. The phone waiting time has never been long. What a great value for a product that costs so little. There are things I would like to see improved, such as when I back it up before closing the program, it wouldn’t limit the number of backups on my external USB flash drive, but that’s a minor problem.

Emergency ID and Medical Information

What if you were traveling and became involved in an accident leaving you incapacitated! How would an ambulance medic and ER facility know how to correctly treat you if your medical condition was

special, or you had preferences? In my case, I’m diabetic and now take Coumadin (blood thinner) so it would be important for the medic to know that. Identification Devices L.L.C. offers a compact USB Flash drive to hold vital information that could help a medic make the right decisions. Wear it around your neck, or even put it on your key chain so a medic can see it (the Medical logo is on one side) when examining you, and can then plug it into the USB port on their laptop. Instantly, it gives the default choice to open your information screen. That instantly brings up a form with your necessary medical and other information, along with your picture. You simply type in all the necessary information yourself, no complicated instructions to follow, just fill in the labeled blanks.

The company sent me one to try and I was impressed with how easy it was to use and type in the necessary data. The data includes your personal information with emergency phone numbers for whomever you designate, and your doctors, drugs, important medical warnings (if necessary), your insurance companies and also your attorney information. There is a spot for your picture in the upper corner, and even a way to load PDF files for important documents such as a living will, power of attorney, your own personal instructions and other important documents if you want them there. I was impressed that most of the blanks in the form could be expanded to a larger space by double-clicking them to insert additional information,



Windows SIG September 25: More of Tuesday Night Special

The Windows Special Interest Group (SIG) meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month. The SIG focuses on using and maintaining Windows, all platforms. We take questions, present tips and techniques, demonstrate freeware/shareware and even feature some web topics using a little trickery.

This month, our topic will continue from last month’s “Tuesday Night Special.” If you have a suggestion or a topic for a future SIG meeting, please email me at mikes_line@hotmail.com.

Remember that the meetings are at the Florence Bain Senior Center, and begin at 7 pm. See the CMUG website at www.myCMUG.org for maps and directions.

Hope to see you there.

- Mike Hayes

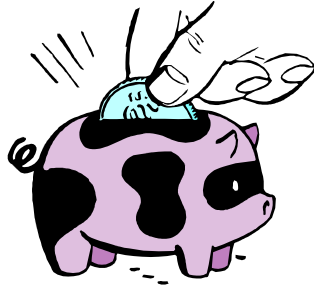


such as additional doctors, medications and other vital information. It can be password protected if you desire, but I wouldn't want that. The MSRP is \$24.95 + \$4.95 S & H.

They are offering DealsGuy readers a \$2.50 discount, but only if you call 1-866-955-0535 to order and mention the DealsGuy column. Larger orders can get a better discount. Ignoring the discount, you can order it on their Web site www.identificationdevices.net using your credit card. I think this product is a great value.

Be Aware

If you are interested in either of the products below, be sure to do your homework and check their website for further information because I edited a lot of information out to make them fit. I have not tried either product.



Hope My Wife Doesn't Use This Remote Control Stuff on Me!

Anyplace Control Software released version 4.0 of Anyplace Control, an acknowledged remote monitoring solution. The new version extends the frontiers of remote control and now can bypass routers and firewalls, as well as support PCs with dynamic IPs.

Anyplace Control displays the desktop of the remote computer, letting you use your own keyboard and mouse to control it remotely. At any point in time, and to any place in the world that has Internet connection, you can monitor your PC and get data transferred to or from it. The program can be used over a LAN, and it doesn't need a Web connection. Anyplace Control can connect to multiple computers at a time. With Anyplace Control, you will get the smoothest remote connection experience along with full control over the system without an external static IP address. Another good thing is that the program can automatically bypass routers and firewalls that lie between the remote computer and your machine.

You no longer need to spend time sending files via email because it's easier to transfer them directly. The program can transfer any kind of data, and you can be sure that the information you send will be delivered immediately with no response delay. Home users can use the program to get access to their office computers and work from home, or check their own PC while away from home.

Anyplace Control runs under all versions of Microsoft Windows and costs \$22 (USD) for a single-user license. Licensed customers are entitled to free technical support and upgrades. More information on Anyplace Control, as well as a free trial copy is available free of charge from www.anyplace-control.com.

"I'd like to offer your group a 10% discount. Please contact me at info@anyplace-control.com and name your group to get the discount." (DealsGuy comment: take a close look at their refund policy and the discount!).

Regards,
Goncharuk Yuriy
Chief Executive Officer
yura@anyplace-control.com

Direct download link: www.anyplace-control.com/ [anyplace-control/ data/ AnyplaceControlInstall.exe](http://www.anyplace-control.com/anyplace-control/data/AnyplaceControlInstall.exe) (2.7 mb)

A Freebie for Managing Your Downloads

FreeDownloadManager.org announced the release of a new version of their Free Download Manager. The list of FDM features includes accelerating downloads up to 600%, resuming broken downloads, simultaneous downloading from several mirrors, http/https/ftp/bittorrent support, flash video downloads support, video conversion and more. FDM 2.5 is released under the GPL license and is now open-source software.

The new version of Free Download Manager stands out due to its expanded possibilities. Now, FDM works as an upload manager as well, making it easy to share files with other people. FDM now allows downloading files using Bittorrent protocol, as well as downloading video from video sites, such as YouTube, Google Video, MySpace videos, etc. The video can be saved in native .flv format or converted to one of more of the popular video formats. The FDM Team has also added more flexibility to the software providing an opportunity to control FDM remotely, via the Internet. Another new feature, portable mode, will be especially appreciated by users who want to always have the program close at hand. They can easily create FDM portable version and enjoy the software on every computer without another installation.

For more information on FDM, visit the product web site: www.freedownloadmanager.org. Download link: www.freedownloadmanager.org/fdminst.exe.

That's All Folks

That's it for this month. I'll have more new product announcements on my website (most not offering a discount): www.dealsguy.com. Meet me here again next month if your editor permits. This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound.

- *Bob (The Cheapskate) Click*

bobclick at bellsouth dot net



Help! My Vinyl Is Melting!

by Lou Torraca, via APCUG

If you have the same problem as I do, read on, a solution is available. I have hundreds, yup, hundreds of vinyl records, 78s, 33s, and even a few 45s stashed in my garage which is a pretty hot spot (no, not a Wi-Fi hotspot, just a place that is hot). I've thought about converting them to cassettes (yes, I've been thinking about this for a while), then to CDs and now to DVDs. I just attended a techie conference and one of the many presentations was on this very subject, so I paid lots of attention and took notes. The presenter also talked about how to convert other media, e.g. VHS tapes, but I'll save that for another column.

So, how do you convert these black plastic disks to a shiny CD or DVD? Here is a step-by-step tutorial with some examples of equipment and software, as well as some URLs which you may want to take a look at.

This tutorial is designed to provide a few tips to help you get the music from your turntable to computer and ready for burning to CD. It doesn't cover the complex area of audio restoration in which software is used to clean up noisy records. Not to worry, though, I'll point you in the right direction at the end of the tutorial.

Equipment Needed

You'll need the following equipment to produce a signal capable of driving a typical computer soundcard.

- ↳ A turntable fitted with a good quality cartridge and stylus. This is one I found via Google for \$99
- ↳ A Pre-Amplifier with RIAA equalization as well as a front panel. The two I bought cost only \$35; however, if you have lots of dough, you can get one for \$1800!
- ↳ Interconnecting cables

Turntable Cartridge

The turntable must be positioned on a solid level surface. The cartridge should be adjusted near the maximum recommended playing weight and the anti-skating adjustment checked. For best results you should use a magnetic type cartridge. If you change cartridge type make sure the cartridge matches the arm type. Crystal/ceramic cartridges are not recommended.

Cleaning

Carefully clean the stylus before playing each side of a record. Always clean from the back of the stylus to the front and use some alcohol if necessary.

Your stylus should be regularly checked for wear as a worn stylus will permanently damage your records. A worn stylus should be replaced.

The records, too, must be as clean as possible so that surface dust does not build up on the stylus. Always use a fine fiber brush to remove dust before each playing.

If playing the record reveals high levels of background noise, or if the stylus becomes repeatedly clogged with dirt after playing, you may need to take additional steps. You could use a mixture of alcohol and distilled water to remove dust and dirt that is deep in the record grooves.

Pre-Amplifier

A pre-amplifier must be used to amplify the low-level signal from the pickup to a suitable level for your computer's soundcard. The pre-amplifier must provide RIAA equalization in order to ensure proper frequency response from the record.

Your system may integrate the pre- and power amplifiers into a single unit. In this case, it may be possible to utilize the tape output to send the signal to the soundcard.

If your pre-amplifier has an adjustable output level, use it to ensure that the signal to the soundcard is not too high. If the output level is fixed, then use the gain control in the Windows mixer applet.

Interconnecting Equipment

Most soundcards come with a 3.5 mm jack as the line input connector. However, most hi-fi equipment uses either phono or DIN connectors. You will therefore need to fabricate or purchase a connecting lead which converts between the two connector types.

Make sure that all connectors are of good quality and that they all are seated correctly. Poorly fitting connectors can produce unwanted noise or hum.

Play the Record

Once you have all of the component equipment set up, the next step is to play the record and save a digital copy on your computer. It is best to record one entire side of an album at a time. You will end up with two large digital files, one for each side of the album. Your software should allow you to separate the music tracks prior to copying to CD.

Test Recordings

You should make a test recording to your hard disk, to verify that the sound card is not being driven too hard and causing distortion. Listen carefully for hum during silent passages between song cuts. It is a good idea to actually burn a CD in order to verify that all is well. For example, this will help ensure that your left and right channels are not reversed.

Setting the Recording Level

It is important that the analog signal is presented at appropriate amplitude if optimum results are to be achieved. You don't want too low or too high a recording volume.

Sound recording software will provide a recording level meter which monitors the signal at the A/D converter input.

The sound level should be adjusted so that the loudest sections peak in the -3 to 0 areas of the bar graphs. However, some soundcards will distort at levels somewhat below this. In such cases, it is best to record at a lower level and then to digitally adjust the level after recording (normalizing).

If your pre-amplifier has an output level control, you should use this to adjust recording levels. In this case, set the applet control to maximum and adjust the recording level using the control on your pre-amplifier.





The Windows applet is located at Start/All Programs/Accessories/Entertainment/Volume Control. [Ed. note: or double-click on the Volume control on the right side of your Taskbar.] Select Options/Properties and then "Adjust Volume For - Recording". Make sure that the Line check box is checked. This will enable a volume control for the soundcard Line Input. Now check the select check box under the Line volume slider. If necessary, you can use the slider to set the recording level.

Next, open your recording program and adjust the recording level using the program's level meters.

Vinyl Record Audio Restoration

Once you have successfully transferred recorded music from turntable to computer, you will probably want to use an audio restoration program to clean up the sound.

Most old vinyl records will have a certain amount of surface damage which will affect the sound. During playback, you may hear some surface noise and a number of click and pops. Particularly annoying are the repeating clicks which occur when the damage has spanned several adjacent record grooves and which consequently repeat once per revolution of the record.

Audio restoration software uses digital filters to help remove the unwanted noise. The one that all the gurus seem to like is Audacity and the good news is, it's free! You will find it at [http:// audacity. sourceforge. net](http://audacity.sourceforge.net).

Burning

Once you have recorded all the required tracks from an LP and removed any clicks, pops, scratches or whatever, it is a straightforward task to write the tracks onto a blank CD/DVD using your CD/DVD writing software.

First decide if you want an audio CD/DVD or would rather make up an MP3 disc.

A normal CD should play in any domestic player, but an MP3 CD needs a player that can cope with this format. They are now more widely available than previously: most domestic DVD players, some in-car CD players, and some personal CD players will play MP3 discs. The big advantage with MP3 format is that of capacity. A normal audio disc can hold say 20 tracks of average length (80 minutes or thereabouts), while an MP3 format disc can hold between 10 and 20 albums!! This is done using data compression techniques which result in much reduced file sizes with very little lost sound quality.

Once you have decided between the two formats, you can use your CD/DVD writing software to assemble a collection of audio tracks to be burned to CD/DVD. Don't forget to separate the tracks before burning.

Other Options

Now for a few other options for the technically challenged (me included) and for the fiscally unlimited (more dough than you know what to do with, which does not include me).

Editor's Note

from Paul Van Bloem

I have a number of notes I've made to myself about items I should mention in an Editor's Note. Since this newsletter is going to be late anyway, I might as well take the time to pass along this valuable information to you.

1 BR Ocean Condo, 4 Sale Cheep

As I mentioned at the last meeting, Bob Click, who writes the DealsGuy column we run each month, is selling his vacation condo in Daytona Beach (he and his wife live in Orlando). If you're at all interested, or know someone who might be, check out his website at www.dealsguy.com. There's a link from there to his "Wonderful oceanfront Realestate opportunity." It's a 1 bedroom condo on the ground floor of a 17 story building, on the ocean. Bob has a bunch of photos to give you an idea of the layout and the views. They're asking \$220k.

Computer-Human Interface

I've had some weird experiences lately with buying things over the Internet, and have been mulling them over.

The most recent was an MP3 player I bought from Woot.com (www.woot.com). Haven't had time to play with the player yet, but I occasionally checked the FedEx website to track the package. It went from Texas to Martinsburg WV in a couple of days, and I was thinking it would arrive much earlier than FedEx was estimating. It turned out I was wrong, tho,



For the first category, an all-in-one CD recorder may be for you. For a bit more than \$400, depending on shipping, this little gem from TEAC will do most of the work for you. Of course, for those with no equipment such as a turntable, it provides one. Check it out at: <http://tinyurl.com/22x2jy>

For the second category, here's where you can go to have all the work done for you...at a price of course! <http://tinyurl.com/34w8oj>

BTW, I'd suggest you check the Internet for other possibilities, as there are lots of places that feature both hardware and software for just this purpose. One of them is www.dak.com

That's it for now. Remember, be safe out there on the 'net, but have fun with all the consumer electronic goodies.

Aloha, Lou

This article comes to us via APCUG, the Association of Personal Computer User Groups, of which CMUG is a member. Lou Torraca is president of the MOAA Computer User Group in Hawaii; their website is at www.the-tug.org; Lou can be reached via email at [Af06hi\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:Af06hi(at)gmail.com).





because the package next went to Madison, Wisconsin (!). Then it came back to Martinsburg, and was delivered exactly when FedEx had predicted. I suppose these shipping errors have always happened, it's just now we can see them.

Before that, I had ordered a poster from www.allposters.com. I saw an interesting 1950 photo of a Lockheed plane with lower Manhattan in the background, and thought it would be a good poster to hang up at work. It was a bit pricey (\$25 with shipping, unframed), but I ordered it. After 10 days, a very similar poster arrived: a 1949 picture of a Boeing plane over the GW Bridge in NY. This was **not** suitable for me to hang at work, so I emailed them to complain about the error, figuring I shouldn't have to pay the shipping to return the wrong poster. They were apologetic and sent the right poster, and said I could keep the wrong one. (If anyone has a need for a 27x20 black and white photo of a Boeing Stratocruiser, let me know. It's number 382211 on the AllPosters website.)

I had a problem before that with a Lands End shipment. The UPS driver apparently couldn't figure out where my apartment was, so he reported I had moved, and I got a voice mail from UPS asking where I had moved to. I told them I hadn't moved, and gave them instructions for the driver to make the delivery. When I checked back a week later, I discovered that my package was still sitting there (in Frederick), there was no record of my calling them with instructions, and they were going to send the package back to Lands End. I got conflicting messages from UPS; the national (800 number) office said I'd have to go to Frederick to pick it up, while the local guys talked about having a supervisor drop it off for me on his way home. Eventually, it was delivered.

And one more example. Last Christmas I ordered a bunch of Kill-a-Watt Electricity Usage Monitors. It's a neat gadget that you plug into a wall outlet, and then in turn plug something into it. The Kill-a-Watt keeps track of how much electricity is used by whatever is plugged into it. So you can see how much power is being used by your TV, or fridge, or whatever.

I bought six or seven Kill-a-Watts to give as Christmas gifts. (Don't you wish you were on my Christmas list!?) They came in mid-December, and I wrapped and mailed a few of them. On Christmas Eve, I was gathering up what I needed to wrap for Christmas Day gift-giving, and discovered there were more Kill-a-Watts left in the box than there should have been. In fact, the company had sent me 11 Kill-a-Watts. I emailed them about receiving too many, and the reply was they were sorry to inconvenience me, and I should keep the extras.

After all this, I'm wondering how mail order places stay in business, and I'm not surprised how expensive shipping is. We've reached the point where the computer systems work very well; my packing slip from AllPosters, for example, actually had a thumbnail print of the (correct) poster on it. So things are fine right

up until a warehouse guy has to put the right poster in the tube, or the delivery driver has to actually deliver the package. Then things (often) don't go so well!

Woot Expands

I mentioned [Woot.com](http://www.woot.com) above, and I know we've mentioned them in *The Megaphone* before. They sell a single gadget each day, starting at midnight Central Time. Worth checking out if you happen to be up at 1 am our time.

They've recently expanded to offer T-shirts. Part of this is a weekly contest, where you can submit a potential T-shirt design to match a theme. Then they tally votes on the different designs (anyone who has ever ordered from them can vote once for any number of the entries), and the three top vote-getters are produced on the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday following. The winner also gets \$200 and some extra royalties on subsequent sales.

As with Woot's gadget sales, there's one T-shirt for sale, and it can sell out (I think at 750 shirts). The shirts are \$10, and shipping is included (tho you can pay an extra \$5 for overnight shipping). Of course, they don't really run out of shirts, because they can always print more. So they have a secondary T-shirt sale, where the previously-offered shirts are available for \$15. This secondary group of 15 designs is rotated each week, with the lowest selling shirts being dropped to make room for the new designs.

This probably sounds complicated, but it's mostly an excuse to look at artists' (and would-be artists') submissions, and occasionally buy a T-shirt. (I haven't actually done the buying part yet, so I can't report from experience.)

The Shirt Woot page can be found at <http://shirt.woot.com/>.

Google Maps

I wanted to say a bit about the recent improvements to Google Maps, but I see I'm already running short on space. Maybe I'll write a full article about that for next month. In the meantime, I suggest you check out the new-and-improved Google Maps. Now, when you ask for directions, you can drag the purple line to change the suggested route; basically, you can set up intermediate waypoints for your trip. I found the interface to be very slick and easy to use.

Crash Your Car

Finally, haven't you always wanted to crash-test your car? Or better yet, crash-test someone else's car? Well, you're in luck, because Consumer Reports has done just that. Visit www.consumerreports.org/cro/cars/safety-recalls/carcrashtest/crashtestvideo.htm to watch any of over 200 models get crash-tested. In fact, it's twice the fun, because you get to see a head-on crash test **and** a side crash test! (If you don't want to type the whole URL in, go to www.consumerreports.org, click on the Cars tab, then Safety & Recalls. The "IIHS Crash Test Videos" are what you want.)



CMUG MEGAPHONE

George Coffin
8652 Open Meadow Way
Columbia, MD 21045

Meeting:
Wednesday, September 19, 7:30 pm
Ms. Donora "Donni" Dingman from Verizon
will be speaking to us about FIOS.



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General meetings are held the third Wednesday of every month at 7:30 pm at the Florence Bain Senior Center, near the Harpers Choice Village Center in Columbia MD. The number there is 410-313-7213.

Membership in the user group is currently \$30 (cheap!). Membership includes a monthly subscription to the CMUG Megaphone, a membership directory, full access privileges to the Website, and drawings for free and review software at meetings.

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