

The Bridge

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For group information
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Main Meeting **Wednesday, Sept. 24** **Southwest Tennessee** **Community College**

5983 Macon Cove, Memphis

MEETING LOCATION

Farris Meeting Room A

Second Floor - Farris Building

New Users & Wizards 6:30 p.m.
Main Meeting 7:30 p.m.

Come to the meeting
and check out
what's going on . . .



Bring along a friend!



The School Bell

News From MPCUG Education Services

By Gil Hennon, Education Services Coordinator

While spam email lately gets the most attention, and may result in the creation of a “do not spam” national list, spam may turn out to be the lesser evil in the kingdom of unsolicited garbage. Spam is annoying. Spam clogs email delivery systems. Spam wastes our time. But, so far, spam is only a nuisance. It seldom infects a computer with a virus or parasitic spy program, nor, in most cases, does spam attempt to harvest data from a computer and send it back to the “home site.” Spyware secretly does all these things, and is fast becoming the biggest threat to individual privacy and data security that computer owners have ever encountered.

The category of spyware actually includes a range of parasitic software. Some of it is relatively benign, like spam, and only sneaks in a banner ad or unexpected link for competitors of the Web site you are visiting. A more malicious breed logs what Web sites are visited and what is done there, then sends the information back to a “tracking” organization where this kind of data is packaged and sold to marketers. Another notch higher in nastiness goes to the “scumware” thieves. They divert the payments made to small and non-profit Web sites that guide potential buyers to legitimate Web sales sites.

The very worst of these parasites are “help” utilities and keystroke loggers. “Help” utilities jump in and offer to complete online forms, all the while remembering the customer information that goes with credit card account numbers. Keystroke loggers are more secretive, but harvest the same kind of information before it can be encrypted for an online transaction. In either case, whatever information is captured gets sent back to a home site where it can be used for fraudulent purposes such as identity theft. Be-

havior exhibited by all types of secret parasitic programs includes setting up folders, installing supporting software, setting Registry keys, regularly changing the names and locations of its own files and directories, performing “drive-by” downloads of instructions from its home Web site, and sending back packets of information swiped from users’ computers.

In themselves, none of the spyware parasites does anything illegal. While this sort of marketing and information harvesting is unethical and infuriating, there are no laws against this kind of behavior. The way that information is later used may be illegal. Most states have identity theft laws, even if most of those laws are weakly written and difficult to apply to technological crime. There are no constitutional guarantees of privacy, so the simple act of gathering information is not a crime.

Most parasitic spyware is voluntarily installed by a user. It comes as extra baggage during downloads of music, software, and other seemingly useful content. A small percentage of bots are spread using email attachments, but spyware hasn’t been very successful using email. Infected email still mainly belongs to viruses and worms. Targeted spyware returns the most useful information to its creators, while randomly installed spyware often brings back data that cannot be matched with a particular user and is not worth as much to marketers.

Over the past several months, spyware implants have increased faster than virus and worm infections. The lack of legal prohibitions and the forces of competition have encouraged many previously ethical marketers to adopt the practices of their less scrupulous rivals. Google now installs a program with its free toolbar that updates its files automatically without notifying the user. Adobe harvests cus-

tomers information from the hard drive when Acrobat Reader is installed. Behavior that intrudes on the privacy of a customer is now considered a fair and necessary marketing practice. Computer users who once only had to contend with viruses and worms are now installing "anti-spy" software in addition to "anti-virus" programs.

We encountered a typical example of spyware infection on a secretary's computer last week. She complained of slow processing and being bombarded by pop-up advertising so badly that doing any work on the computer was impossible. After we installed anti-spyware software, a scan found more than one hundred bots running secretly in the background. Another employee was hardly impressed with that number. He had cleaned off over fifteen hundred from his home computer after it had been used for a couple of weeks by his children.

Some parasitic infections cause damage that anti-spyware utilities cannot fix. Fortunately only a small percentage of the 10,212 different identified spyware parasites cause more harm than sluggish performance and rapid-fire advertising. Additional damage is probably unintentional, since the spyware is trying to harvest useful data from a working computer. They do muck about in the Registry and they install or modify some DLL files, so occasionally a parasite program is going to break something. Otherwise, most parasites can infect a machine for a long time without making their presence obvious. Most users only notice them when so many have taken up residence that they begin to seriously degrade system performance. The two leading anti-spyware utilities are *AdAware* by Lavasoft and *Spybot* from PepiMK Software. Really serious spyware haters use both, claiming that they each have offsetting strengths and weaknesses.

Symantec has also announced that their next Norton Anti-virus update will contain spyware identification and removal functions. McAfee is expected to follow suit, but has not yet made any public announcements. Its not surprising that the major anti-virus vendors are all trying to position their products with additional features. Some industry analysts have already predicted the demise of the anti-virus utilities when Microsoft adds a virus scanner and pop-up stopper to the next *XP* upgrade. That expectation isn't shared by everyone, however. There are plenty of folks around who remember Microsoft's first anti-virus product bundled with DOS and early Windows releases. *MSAV* never had a workable method to update its virus definitions, so it was obsolete before it was even installed. About the only thing the software ever did was give many naive users a false sense of security.

If you are trying to banish spyware from your computer, MPCUG Education Services has lots of good information for you. Join the Wizards before each main meeting to hear what works and what doesn't. In the meantime, run those anti-spyware utilities regularly!

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Microsoft Money 2003 Deluxe

Software Review

Reviewed by Vanessa Muldrow

If you are someone that likes to spend your time organizing your finances, investing or preparing for taxes, *Microsoft Money 2003 Deluxe* may be for you.

I had been using *Microsoft Money 2002 Standard* just for fun. Using *Microsoft Money 2003* was fun, yet I found it a bit difficult to learn at first. There are so many functions that it is easy to get lost.

Once I found out how to make it work, I noticed that 2003 differs mildly from the 2002 version. Although 2003 offers new and exciting features, its purpose is the same as 2002's: to help you organize your finances.

I found the most interesting feature to be the new Bills Outbox and Batch Bill Pay. Outbox allows you to prepare your bills online and send them at a later date. Batch Bill Pay allows you to send all your bills at one time.

This is a great feature if you have a busy schedule. One up is that you get a year of free online Bill Pay from MSN. To take advantage of this offer you must have an msn email account set up.

Another new feature is the new Bill Estimator. This feature estimates your bills based on previous payments, and it allows you to see where your account balance stands at all times. *Money 2003* also balances your account. With the new Auto Balancing feature, *Money* balances your account from day to day.

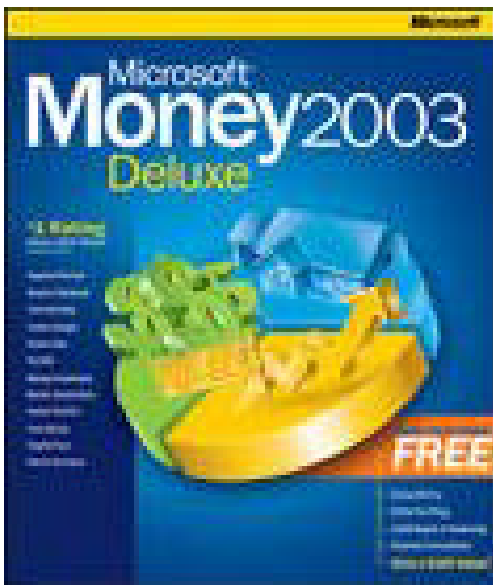
I like to see where and what I am spending my money on at all times. With *Money*, you can create reports that help you analyze your spending with a new feature called Comparison Reports. It also allows you to tailor your home page. You can customize your portfolio. This feature is called Portfolio Customization Toolbar. It is a great feature for people interested in investing. I am not an investor (yet).

For those who are interested in investing, *Money* offers many new tools for your investment needs. It includes a new Investment Reminder and an improved Stock Performance Alert tool. If you take advantage of the Portfolio Customization Toolbar, the new Portfolio Highlights will provide you with information that is applicable to what you provide in your portfolio.

For tax purposes, the tax estimator has been improved. Now, you can avoid errors and it provides you with a better breakdown of your taxes with the new Side-by-Side Comparisons tool. You can file your taxes through H&R Block. With Equifax, you can check your credit reports, and you are allowed a consultation with an American Express financial planner. The new Home Page Task View is a great new feature. Unlike last year's version, with 2003 you can customize your task bar to get to your most important tasks.

Microsoft Money 2003 Deluxe is a good product for people who are interested in finances, investments and taxes. Although some of the new features are nice, other features make the product confusing (to me) and hard to use at the beginning.

Money ranges from about \$49.99 to \$59.95. It is good value for the price. You just have to be the kind of person that wants to track his or her money.



www.microsoft.com/money/default.asp

August Meeting Report

Ink jet printers: When they work correctly they are great. When they work badly, they are absolutely horrible.

John Schuster tackled three printers with a variety of ills brought in by members. Besides the inability to print, they had driver problems, stuck parts, and evidence of some nasty leaks. John went through them one at a time after first giving a warning that any ink jet printer left idle for a long period of time might not recover with even the best of attention.

The ink nozzles on these printers are tiny holes that spray ink droplets onto the paper. Those tiny holes become easily clogged with dried ink. John finds this condition to be common with inoperative printers. He showed us his home-grown method for opening clogged nozzles. He

boils water (normally in a microwave oven, but for the meeting he used Jim Ingram's coffee pot) and soaks the print heads for about fifteen minutes. In the case of the three printers available at the meeting, a single soaking was not enough to break through the clogs. John suggested trying several soakings before giving up, but advised that a really badly clogged print head will probably have to be replaced to make the printer work again.

John also had to perform some diagnostics on the demo computer. As usual, he eventually got it working and able to control the printers, even though the print heads remained stubbornly shut. Thank you, John, for sharing your knowledge with your fellow members. (And he didn't leave a mess in the auditorium either!)

A big THANK YOU to Bill Cavanaugh . . .

If you have been coming to MPCUG meetings for any time at all, you have probably gathered that the Group has met at Southwest Tennessee Community College for a long time. For more than sixteen years—back to the days when the campus was called “State Tech”—they have hosted our meetings and several special events. The partnership between STCC and MPCUG has been very beneficial for our members. We would have been hard pressed, in many instances, to provide as much service and value to the members without the generous support of STCC's administration and faculty.

Recently the rules for using campus facilities were changed, and we found that to continue holding our meetings at STCC, we needed a sponsor—a full-time member of the school administration. I am happy to report that Bill Cavanaugh, the Director of Graduate Placement, came to our rescue. Bill graciously agreed to sponsor our Group so we can continue our long-standing excellent relationship with good ol' “State Tech!”

If you know Bill, please make it a point to thank him for his support. If you don't know him, you need to get acquainted with our benefactor. And if you are an employer who needs some really good new employees, you definitely need to make friends with him!



Again, many thanks and a salute from The Bridge to you, Bill!

Microsoft Personal Collection 2002

Software Review

Reviewed by Rick Fischer

Microsoft's bundles are all about value. *Personal Collection 2002* is still available in some stores and on the Web for around \$45, but it is no longer shipping from Microsoft and I don't see a replacement.

Personal Collection 2002 is a bundle of four Microsoft products: *Picture It! Photo 2002*, *Encarta 2002*, *Money 2002* and *Microsoft Office Personal Collection*. All but *Personal Collection* have been updated.

The idea is for a shopper to compare the cost of one of these products with the price for the bundle. For a little more I could have all of this. I am unable to do a price comparison today because 2002 versions of the products have been superseded by newer versions. Typically, you got one or more of the products for free.

That is easy to do because you got four CDs in one box. No manuals. Very cost-effective from a marketing perspective.

Picture IT! Photo is an entry-level photo program that is very easy to use. They guide you step by step with an intuitive home page. I started with the seven teaching videos. All are short and take you through a fairly narrow procedure or topic. We start with Getting Started then see an ad for *Picture It! Publisher*. I just bought and installed one product and the video intimates, "maybe you should have bought the upgrade." Should I feel foolish, or hold that thought for next year when I might be thinking about an upgrade?

We learn about the gallery, using stacks, cutouts, and cloning painting. The

final video is about what I can do with photos should I subscribe to MSN.

Encarta Standard 2002 boasts 38,000 articles. Please see the June 2003 *Bridge* for a full review.

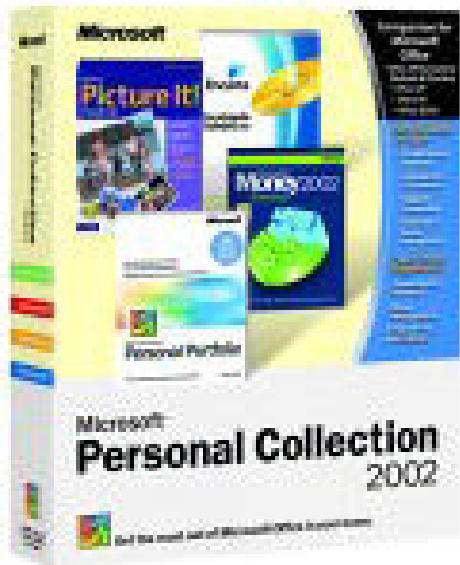
Money 2002 has been updated. You should see Vanessa Muldrow's review of *Money 2003* in this issue or the next.

Office Personal Portfolio 2002 seems to be the orphan in the group. It offers "more than 600 helpful templates" for *Word*, *Excel*, *Outlook* and *PowerPoint*. The interface for this program is excellent. You have templates at your fingertips on a wide range of topics. I have re-labeled the program "Microsoft Templates" because that is how I think of it.

Templates are organized by program, then by category. So, Under *Excel* you have categories: clubs, education, home finance, home lists, recreation lists, special paper, and sports lists. Under *Outlook*, you get stationery. In *PowerPoint* the templates are mostly for kids' presentations. Look elsewhere for professional slide masters – maybe Microsoft's Template Gallery:

officeupdate.microsoft.com/TemplateGallery/default.asp. You will also find a lot of templates for organizing pictures in *PowerPoint*. Most of the templates (in 14 categories) are for *Word*.

Although it is not in the current product lineup, *Personal Portfolio* is still a useful product. It could be even more useful if Microsoft made it easy to add templates to the portfolio. That way we could go to the Template Gallery or other site and stow new templates using Microsoft's (yet



to be built in) flexible organizing scheme.

The Help menu does not cover adding templates to the portfolio. Although I can see where the files are located, each template has a .bmp file that represents the actual template file on the interface. The categories would also need to be editable – sort of like the “favorites” menu item in *Internet Explorer*. That’s my two cents on how to extend the life of this program and add value.

Requires: Pentium 166 MHz or faster processor; Microsoft Windows 95, 98, 2000, Me, NT 4.0, or XP; 64 MB RAM; 395 MB hard disk space; 4x or faster CD-ROM drive; SVGA, 256-color display with 800 x 600 resolution; Mouse; Microsoft Office 97, Office 2000, or Office XP

Out for review

Here is a list of software, books, or other products you can expect to see reviewed here in the coming months. These members checked out items to review for the benefit of all.

Windows Me: The Missing Manual
 Teach Yourself GoLive 5 in 24 Hours
 Linux in a Nutshell
 Spell Catcher
 Civilization: Call to Power
 Links 2003
 Microsoft Office 2000 8 in 1
 Windows Security Handbook
 The Little Web Cam Book
 Linux Server Hacks
 Microsoft Works 7.0
 How to Use Microsoft FrontPage 2002
 The Complete Idiot's Guide to Starting
 A Business Online
 Space Bunnies Must Die (game)
 Sin (game)
 X-Wing vs Tie Fighter
 Star Wars: Behind the Magic
 Extreme Tennis
 Photoshop Type Effects
 Teach Yourself ASP.net in 24 Hours
 Sportsman's Challenge
 Top Shot
 Using MS Windows 2000 Prof
 FrontPage for Win 2000 (book)
 Windows XP Pro (book)
 FrontPage 2002 Unleashed
 PC Firewall
 Macromedia (book)
 QuarkXPress 6 (book)
 Windows XP (book)

Greg Adams
 Allison Banks
 Thad Craig
 Deborah Hart-Curtis
 Morgan Curtis
 Mike Dudas
 Dorothy Drum
 Dorothy Drum
 Mike Heinrich
 Gil Hennon
 Jim Ingram
 David Levine
 David Levine

Adam Locke
 Adam Locke
 Adam Locke
 Adam Locke
 Adam Locke
 Bill Luber
 Jim McGee
 Kim McNeil
 Paul Merz
 Eric Miles
 Lee Mouring
 Daniel Notowitz
 Carl Osborne
 John Schuster
 David Stowell
 George Stringham
 Terry Thomas

Thanks to all who checked out products for review. Let’s keep the Group vital and provide value for membership.

That Blasted Blaster!

Editorial

by **Gil Hennon**

Like most horror stories, this one began with an otherwise unremarkable event. On July 16th, Microsoft added a new patch on the Windows Update Web site and sent out notifications about it to network administrators and data security technicians. The patch corrected a flaw in Microsoft's Distributed Component Object Module code (DCOM) that could be exploited by sending an intentionally corrupted Remote Procedure Call (RPC) to a specific port. RPCs allow a user on one computer to run application software on another computer. Usually the two computers are located some distance apart—often in different cities. The Microsoft patch was supposed to prevent DCOM from accepting RPC instructions from unauthorized sources that arrived at the computer's ports.

There was nothing to distinguish this patch, or even the problem it corrected, from many other patches Microsoft makes available to Windows users. No fanfare or hoopla accompanied its debut. For a little over three weeks, the DCOM RPC patch was pretty much ignored by three quarters of the computer users whose machines were vulnerable. During that same time, a few pieces of example code demonstrating how to exploit the DCOM RPC vulnerability appeared on several Web sites frequented by ethically challenged programmers. You get only one guess as to what one of them did with that available exploit code. On August 11, users of several anti-virus products reported identification of an unknown virus or worm using current virus definitions.

W32.LOVSAN.WORM.A happened to contain an identical character string to an already identified virus, even though the infector filename and file size were different. Another anti-virus company simultaneously isolated the worm and named it W32/BLASTER.WORM. By the end of the day it had become obvious that both names referred to the same infection, and the Blaster name was being said most often. It was not a very good worm. The code was not very smart. It did search through networks for computers to infect, targeting unpatched machines with open RPC ports. It took the rest of the week for Blaster to reach its peak number of infections. By Friday, about 1.5 million computers had been infected. Most of those were home machines. Business computers behind a firewall were considered reasonably well shielded from the worm.

But some business computers were also being infected. Small companies without firewalls were excellent targets for the worm, and companies that did have firewalls didn't count on laptop users bringing infected machines onto the premises. Regardless of how Blaster found its way in, from five to thirty seconds after it found a network it was infecting other unpatched machines. Friday, August 15th was not only the day that infections peaked, it was the last chance to stop Blaster from triggering its payload.

Until August 16th, the worm didn't do much more than travel around on networks and infect computers. Saturday was the trigger date for all of the infected machines to join in a concerted Denial of

Service (DoS) attack against Microsoft's Windows Update Web site. In the last hours of Friday night, just before the attacks



were scheduled to begin, Microsoft removed its upgrade site listing from Domain Name Servers. When the floods of transmissions from infected computers began pouring out onto the networks, there was no place for them to go.

The Blaster horror story might have ended there, with nothing left to do but clean the infection off of a lot of computers. But there were still a few bizarre twists in the plot. Two variants of the original Blaster code had joined the fray. Version B and C were identified on August 13. A Minnesota teenager was eventually arrested for authoring Blaster.B, although calling him an author might be too generous. He only changed a text string in the code that the worm never displays on the screen, and he added a timer that reboots an infected computer every ten minutes. Lastly, he changed the name of the executable file that installs the worm from msblast.exe to penis32.exe. If that hadn't been juvenile and stupid enough, he bragged about doing it on his Web site and to his school friends. When taken into custody, he seemed completely surprised that anyone was upset about his part in nearly a billion dollars worth of damage.

The C version of Blaster was more

sophisticated than the teenager's hack. Again the infecting filename was changed to teekids.exe but the payload added a back door Trojan program to every computer it infected. The author of Blaster.C was more discreet than Minnesota Jeffrey and has not yet been identified.

When the weekend was over, another wild card dropped into the story. W32.WELCHIA.WORM was identified on Monday. It contained code similar to Blaster, exploiting the same RPC port vulnerability, but the code was written much better. At first glance, Welchia—more commonly known as the Nachi worm—looked like “good guy” code. It entered unpatched computers and cleaned out the Blaster worm if it was present. Then Nachi tried to force a download of the Microsoft patch that would fix the vulnerability and rebooted the computer so that the patch became active. Nachi was probably written by someone with good intentions, even though fighting a worm with another worm is a questionable strategy. Did I say that Nachi was better code? It was much more aggressive than Blaster and found its way through firewalls. It was able to infect computers on which the patch had been installed but not yet rebooted. Nachi was so aggressive in searching networks for target computers that only a few Nachi infected machines were able to spew out enough network traffic to bring down routers and servers. This “good guy” worm turned out to be just about as much trouble as the Blaster worm it was trying to eliminate. Nachi was also difficult to remove from an infected machine. Usually several anti-virus scans and cleanings were necessary to find all the places where Nachi was hiding.

While all of the variants of Blaster and the Nachi worm were warring with each

other, unrelated hackers found a golden opportunity to spread a few more viruses and worms around by attaching them to email messages claiming to be a Blaster worm eradication tool. This may have been how a freshly written variant of the old SoBig virus came to infect more computers than the slower moving Blaster worm. This new version, W32.SOBIG.F@mm, contained a Trojan that would be triggered at 3:00 p.m. on August 22nd. Nobody could tell by reading the code just exactly what the Trojan would do when triggered, and that hour came and went without anything happening that interested anyone. SoBig.F was a pain in the you-know-what, but not as bad as it might have been.

On the 19th of August a new variant of Blaster appeared. The D version didn't cause any noticeable increase in infections. The majority of computers had received the patch by then. About the same result occurred on August 28th when Blaster.E was identified. It had something new. When it triggered, it would DoS attack kimble.org rather than Microsoft. Then, on September 1, a Romanian hacker accidentally released Blaster.F which targeted a site named tuiasi.ro. The infecting executable had been named enbiei.exe, which happened to be the hacker's online pseudonym. Although the F version appears to have never infected any Romanian computers, hacker Enbiei (the phonetic pronunciation in his language of the sports related letters NBA) has been arrested in his home country.

The Blaster debacle has spawned a lot of questions and a few answers about why so many computers were unprepared for the worm. The preventive patch had been available for three weeks prior to Blaster's appearance, but only about 25% of the Windows computer population had

installed the update. Network and system administrators complained that they were still testing the compatibility of their networks and legacy systems with previous patches. Many of them had not approved the DCOM RPC patch as safe for their company's computers. Those that had approved the patch had not finished installing it. Computer users are a lot more mobile than they used to be, so making sure all machines have the necessary upgrades is a slow process. A contributing factor mentioned often is the small number of information security employees working for the average company. There are too few to keep up with day to day user requests and system problems and way too few doing the research and testing necessary to certify a new patch and oversee its installation. For them, the patching scenario is broken and they have no fix.

Home machines and business computers not protected by a firewall were hit hardest because these users spend no time at all doing preventive maintenance. Their machines typically are only fixed when they don't work. Otherwise they are in use doing what they were purchased to do. The average home or small business has no dedicated information security employee in place. Any computer maintenance is an unwanted extra duty that is largely ignored.

Apparently the computing community did not learn from the Code Red crisis or the I Love You virus or even the recent Slammer infections that systems and anti-virus software must be kept up to date. Users should take some of the blame for the Blaster mess. There's no intention to reduce the blame of the hackers who released the code. Their part was intentional, while the actions of the users were not.

And what part of the blame should be laid on Microsoft? The vulnerabilities were initially the company's problem, and they exposed customers to data loss risks and monetary damage. The rift between Microsoft supporters and detractors was considerably widened by the Blaster worm.. On the one hand, the licensing agreement we all must accept in order to use Windows clearly states that Microsoft is not liable for any problems or damage we receive as a result of using its software. On the other hand, any business that expects to continue operating into the future has to stand behind its products. Can Microsoft continue to alienate its best customers and expect them to keep coming back?

In the past year, according to a variety of estimates, U. S. businesses shelled out somewhere between four and seven billion dollars to fight and clean up after Code Red, Nimda, Slammer, and now Blaster. The cost around the world was probably several times that amount. Losses of that magnitude don't go unnoticed in these days of corporate officer close scrutiny and shareholder lawsuits. Folks get mighty testy about unpredictable expenses and negative impacts on the bottom line, and especially their dividends. It can be only a matter of time before corporate officers will be forced to find less costly software solutions.

Also, the past year has seen growing dissatisfaction with software licensing that places every burden and risk upon the customer. Software is the only industry that has been able to successfully insulate itself from responsibility to deliver a workable product. The Federal Trade Commission and the Consumer Protection Agency never let auto manufacturers get away with delivering vehicles that don't work or have flaws. The Food and Drug

Administration makes pharmaceutical and edible goods manufacturers toe the line on product quality and purity. Some of these agencies and others are beginning to take a long, hard look at software licenses and development practices.

Coincidentally, all of this comes at a time when the software industry is desperately trying to revive their stalled legal protection initiatives in many state legislatures. The Uniform Computer Information Transaction Act (UCITA), a law promoted and heavily lobbied to state governments, would extend the Uniform Commercial Code and grant software developers unprecedented immunity from product liability laws. Unfortunately for the industry, many of the same states where they need a UCITA victory in the legislature have had their budgets socked by the expense to clean up after worms and viruses that exploit software product flaws. UCITA isn't dead, but it will need life support as long as the Blaster mess remains in everyone's minds. A few states are even looking at existing software license laws with an eye to requiring the manufacturers to deliver secure products that actually work.

The Blaster worm brought a lot of attention to the update patching process, user responsibility for maintenance, vulnerable products, and software licensing. The last question is whether anyone has learned anything this time. Apparently that didn't happen following all of the previous infection cleanups. Should we take odds on whether it might finally happen now? Microsoft says plenty more nasties like Blaster are coming. They will be a lot more damaging. They will come more frequently with shorter lead time. This horror story is still in its first chapters.

Teach Yourself ASP.NET in 24 Hours: Complete Starter Kit

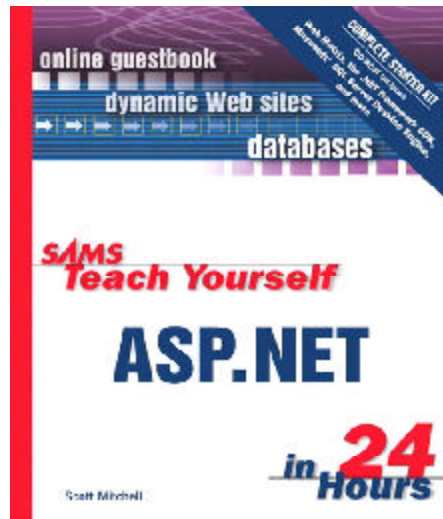
Book Review

Reviewed by Jim McGee

Here's one for the books – the fine print giveth what the large print taketh away!

Absorbing these 600 pages in 24 DAYS would be more like it, but even so it managed to keep my attention where other texts have failed. Why? Because the Starter Kit referred to is Microsoft's own Web Matrix, a free download from www.asp.net. Even though it's a sophisticated GUI environment, the whole thing can lift on a single 1.4 mb diskette, because it relies heavily on the .Net Framework, a much larger download from Microsoft.com.

This framework is a giant set of classes that all the .Net languages like Visual Basic and C# rely on. For those who don't trust version 1.0, the 1.1 *Framework* came out earlier this year, and a new *Web Matrix* followed in a few months. The CD-ROM accompanying the book contains the original versions of *Web Matrix*, the *Framework*, and also Microsoft *SQL Desktop Engine* (MSDE), which is a mini Web server you can install on your *Windows*



2000/XP computer. So you don't have to crank up IIS or test directly on the Web, although you can.

Coming from the Access world, I'm always on the lookout for rapid development tools, even if that brands me as a mere "power user" by the C++ bullies. *Visual Studio.Net* is a very sophisticated and extensible product for Visual Basic and C# programmers, but it's overkill for what I want to begin with: Web-oriented systems with most of the data and the smarts on the *Windows* server, and maybe a little JavaScript on the client. ASP.NET uses Web pages which end in .aspx instead of the typical .html .asp or .jsp.

These .aspx pages are processed by the *Windows* server, and converted to the appropriate HTML. In theory, you develop a single Web page which can be displayed properly on a wide variety of clients and browsers: *Internet Explorer* (of course), *Netscape/Mozilla*, PDAs, phones, pagers, etc.

The book is divided into Hours instead of Chapters as is typical with this long-running SAMS series. The first is devoted to installation and setup. There are a few little services and permissions which must be tweaked to allow MSDE to operate properly, or at all. If you're a *Windows 2000 Server* guru or SQL administrator, this is child's play, but if not this chapter will help you along. Unfortunately, some of this vital information must be dug out of the extensive *Web Matrix* FAQ's, tutorial and forum at www.asp.net.

Hour 2 shows how an ASP.NET page is split in HTML and code sections, which makes it easier to read and understand. The programming language used throughout is Visual Basic as opposed to C#, but *Web Matrix* can handle

either. We see how regular HTML pages and controls can be used directly, if you don't want to move up to the more powerful ASP.NET controls all at once.

Chapter 4 discusses event-driven programming for simple situations: even to submit a page for proper display AFTER data entry and calculation. VB programmers will skim over the next few chapters, but it's nice that *Web Matrix* even has its own .Net *Framework* class browser.

Next we encounter the familiar labels, text boxes, radio buttons and drop-down lists, but each with its own special .NET features. Validation controls are easy to use, but

unfortunately take up a bit more Web page space than I would like.

Chapter 13 begins the section on databases. First, there is a brief explanation of basic SQL statements. *Web Matrix* has an excellent wizard for creating and working with SQL tables – almost as easy as *Access!* There are even wizards that generate code for common SQL tasks. The author spends several chapters on the DataGrid control, and his explanation of the WHY and not just HOW of data binding process is very well done.

The final section develops a small scale Guestbook application with ASP.NET. Along with adding and listing

new guests, especially interesting is sending an e-mail when there is a new guest.

When you're ready, Microsoft has created a handful of complete applications available online at asp.net. Most chapters have a summary section, Q&A, workshop quiz with answers, and exercises which expand on the topics. This organization makes it useful for classroom as well as individual learning. Those with a moderate background in VB and SQL would be the most appropriate target audience.

Teach Yourself ASP.NET in 24 Hours: Complete Starter Kit by Scott Mitchell. SAMS, 2003. \$30.

Memphis PC Users Group Membership Application

Date: ___/___/___

Membership # ___

Name: (Last) _____ (First) _____
(M.I.) _____

Mailing Address: _____ Birth Date: ___/___/___

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ - _____

Home Phone: (____) _____ Business Phone: (____) _____

Fax Number: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Employer: _____ Position: _____

Dues: \$35 per year

For office use only

Check#: _____ Amount: _____ Date: ___/___/___ Initials: _____

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	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
SEP 2003	1	2 DOT.NET	3	4	5	6 INTERNET HARDWARE
SEP 2003	8	9	10	11 VISUAL STUDIO	12	13 WEB WRITERS MS OFFICE
SEP 2003	15 WORDPERFECT	16	17	18	19	20
SEP 2003	22 CLIPPER	23	24 MAIN MEETING	25	26	27 INVESTMENTS
SEP- OCT 2003	29	30	1	2	3	4
OCT 2003	6	7 DOT.NET	8	9 VISUAL STUDIO	10	11 WEB WRITERS MS OFFICE