

THE COMPUTER CORNER

No. 109. Bits and Pieces

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Here are a couple of things that don't warrant a whole article each.

WINDOWS UPDATE: Using Windows 98SE? Did you know there are 47 Critical Updates and Service Packs that have come out for this version? A number are patches that plug security holes of one kind or another, so if you ever connect to the Internet (who doesn't, these days?), you should definitely download and install at least the Critical Updates. Just click the **Start**, then **Windows Update** buttons while connected to the Internet.

Be aware, though, that Microsoft has redesigned their web site and now does collect information when you download. The "...**without sending any information to Microsoft**" disclaimer that used to be there (see #93, Sometimes Microsoft Does It Right) is no longer present. What do they now collect? 1. The version of Windows you are running. 2. The version of Internet Explorer that is on your machine. 3. The version of any other software on your machine that they provide a download for, such as Office. 4. The plug-n-play ID number of hardware devices on your machine. 5. Your region and language settings. The above five items are perfectly reasonable and necessary to the download process. After all, if they are going to furnish you an updated driver for a CD-ROM drive on your machine, they need to know what model it is so that they can make the correct version of the driver available.

On the other hand, there are more items. 6. They generate a globally unique ID number (GUID) for your machine, which they then **store on your machine** (they use this to determine that you have a valid copy of Win98). 7. They also gather the Product ID and ID Key for your version of Windows, which they save just for that connection session. 8. They also gather on their site records of GUID numbers and what was downloaded and configured. Clearly, items 6 - 8 may cause some users to feel an invasion of privacy. On the other hand, they specifically exclude gathering any personal information such as your name, address or email address.

YOUR DATA IN YOUR POCKET: In December, I purchased a bauble smaller than the size of an average car door opener (it even comes with a loop to fit your keychain) that holds 128 Mb of data. You plug it into a USB port on your computer and it becomes recognized as a removable drive, whereupon you can send files to it or get files from it right from Explorer. Windows 98 requires installation of a driver on any machine you want to use it with (downloadable from the manufacturer's website), but Win 2000, Me, XP and Mac 8.6 or higher require no driver at all. You just plug it in and it is ready for use. I got it from BUY.COM for the amazing price of \$69.89 - a \$20 rebate = \$49.89, with free 2nd day air shipping. Called the Jumpdrive, by Lexar Media Products, the bauble is pretty amazing. I put all of the just under 100 files required for Windows 98se installation on it, with some room left over for other files, just to see it work. It did. Of course, in ten years, people will be laughing at this feat of technology, but right now it is amazing. It makes transferring files between computers that are not networked a snap.

NETWORKING/DSL: Speaking of networking, in December I bit the bullet and networked the three computers I have in my office with help from Ray Meyer (N9PBY), an expert at networking. Now I can send files to or get files from any of them. That means that, if I download a 10 Mb file to one, I can transfer copies to the others in well under ten seconds. All are connected to the

Internet at all times, through my DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) service, also new in December. The networking could have been accomplished for well under \$100, but I elected to get some bells and whistles on the router, so the total cost came to \$135 including cables. By the way, with DSL you can use the phone to receive calls or send them, while also connected to the Internet on the same twisted pair. And, it is fast! Just amazing. Do I use a firewall? You bet! The router itself contains a hardware firewall, plus I have a copy of Zone Alarm is on each machine. You just must have a firewall today, even with a plain vanilla dial up connection. Why? See #95, titled Get That Firewall NOW, published in the October 2001 issue of BSSS. What's that, you can't find your copy? Well, just buy a copy of the First 100 on CD-ROM. Yes, you can still download a free copy of Zone Alarm, the best firewall there is. The URL is in #95.

A USE FOR JUNK MAIL CD-ROMs: A notable note came to me from Jack Morrison (N9SFG) who is a mentor with the ARRL Emergency Communications Courses (as am I). One of his students in the course came up with a great idea. Here is what Jack said:

"Have you wondered what to do with those pesky CD-ROMs that keep showing up in your mailbox from time to time? **Stan Piekarczyk, KE6IFC**, ARES Emergency Coordinator for Outagamie County, has come up with quite an ingenious use for them - as an emergency signal mirror. Properly used, the light from one of these commercial CDs can be seen from as far away as 10 miles. Hold the mirrored surface to reflect sunlight, and then sight through the hole in the center. You will see a bright spot in the distance; which is the direction of the reflected beam of sunlight. Keep your eye on it and slowly adjust the mirror position until the bright spot is on top of your target. Thanks to Stan for the idea, a much better use than throwing them away. Keep one in your car, and those of you that have boats might consider keeping one on board for emergencies."

Thanks to N9SFG and KE6IFC for this useful tip. By moving the bright spot on and off the target, I bet you can even send readable code this way. I wonder if you could use one to start a campfire if you flexed the disk to focus the rays? Someone try that next summer. Happy computing!