

FEBRUARY 2003

WELCOME TO THE FEBRUARY EDITION OF FAMILY COMPUTER NEWS
published by VONTRONICS USA, Naples, Florida

If you have received this newsletter by mistake or do not wish to receive it in the future, then we apologize. Please email us with details at <mailto:support@familycomputerusa.com>

Our thoughts are with the crew's families and NASA staff as our nation mourns the loss of the Columbia. This site, <http://columbiamemorial.us/>, speaks for itself.

SMILE! CLICK.

I know that many of you have digital cameras. How about a free online course for getting the most out of these modern wonders? <http://www.shortcourses.com/using/index.htm>

TO UPGRADE OR NOT TO UPGRADE, THAT IS THE QUESTION

We've been asked many times about the wisdom of upgrading your computer instead of buying a new one. There is no "best answer" since it depends on several factors.

Why do you need to upgrade? Is it to be able to run a new program? To add a new device? Always know what your computer's basic specifications are so you can compare them to the Recommended Specifications shown on the box or website for the new product. Don't compare to the Minimum Specifications because those are systems that have no other programs or devices and are not "real-world" systems.

Several items can be upgraded on any computer. You can usually add more RAM, a faster video card, a better sound card, a larger hard drive or a CD or DVD burner. None of these will speed up your computer, and in some case may actually slow it down, but they may allow some programs to operate on your computer that wouldn't before.

Many computer owners get confused about the computer's speed or CPU. Generally, most computers, unless they were the current top-of-the-line when you bought it, can have their CPU's upgraded to a faster speed. BUT, the limitation is that the fastest CPU that you can use is the then-current top-speed CPU of the same type. With the rapid change of CPU speeds and types, if you haven't upgraded the CPU within a year of purchasing your system, you probably can't even buy a CPU that will fit it anymore! If you purchased a Pentium III system, you can't put a Pentium IV onto the same mainboard; it's the wrong technology match. But you could have put a faster Pentium III as long as the same type remains available.

What are the advantages of upgrading? There are two levels of upgrading: minor and major. Minor upgrading involves adding RAM, a new hard drive, maybe a new video or sound card. These upgrades don't change the basic system and will either improve a difficulty you were having or make it possible to load a new program or device. As long as you are only adding a few of these items, then it is much less expensive than buying a new system. Major upgrades involve changing the mainboard, CPU, case or other major components to bring the technology of your system, in general, up to current. Depending on what needs to be done, this can cost

significantly, but has the advantage of retaining your current Windows, programs, data files and personal settings so that it "feels" the same when you get it back. The disadvantages of upgrading is that some of the components remaining will still be as old as your original machine and the upgrade work will carry a shorter warranty than a new system.

What are the advantages of buying a new system? All the components and technology will be new. Your warranty will be longer. You will likely get the latest Windows and additional programs (hopefully the ones you need!). The disadvantages: beyond the cost of a new system, you will not have your programs, data files and personal settings so you will essentially be starting over. There are utility programs that can import some of the files and settings, but there will still be a significant difference in the way you work with it.

Each situation is different and you must weigh the factors to decide which choice is best. If you need help with the decision, please feel free to call so we can help you understand the choices for your unique situation.

MUSIC SETTLEMENT CASE

Remember the Minimum Advertised Price (MAP) scandal that rocked the music industry? Here's the short story: The record industry colluded with certain chain stores to set a MAP, supposedly to prevent other record stores from going out of business. This was ruled illegal. If you bought a CD between 1995 and 2000, the Big Five labels owe you up to \$20. Registering for your money is easy, and you don't even need to supply a receipt.

<http://www.musiccdsettlement.com/english/default.htm>

The Distributor Defendants are:

"Capitol Records, Inc." d/b/a EMI Music Distribution, Virgin Records America, Inc., and Priority Records LLC;

"Time Warner, Inc.", Warner-Elektra-Atlantic Corp., WEA, Inc., Warner Music Group, Inc., Warner Bros. Records, Inc., Atlantic Recording Corporation, Elektra Entertainment Group, Inc., and Rhino Entertainment Company;

"Universal Music & Video Distribution Corporation", Universal Music Group, Inc., and UMG Recordings, Inc.;

"Bertelsmann Music Group, Inc." and BMG Music; and

"Sony Music Entertainment Inc."

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<http://www.taxact.com>

H&R Block's "TaxCut" is also available online starting at \$19.95.

<http://www.hrblock.com/taxes/partners/taxcut/otp.html>

Intuit, makers of Quicken and QuickBooks, offers "TurboTax" online starting at \$19.95.

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

There have been some problems noted with the latest CD version of TurboTax. Intuit has included SafeCast software, also known as C-Dilla, which provides copy-protection by monitoring the use of your CD-R/W drive and preventing the copying of the original TurboTax CD. Even after you un-install TurboTax, the C-Dilla software remains installed.

Intuit has, however, released an "uninstaller" for the SafeCast C-Dilla component. It is automatically sent to you from Intuit during their regular online TurboTax update check. However, this is only useful if you plan to uninstall TurboTax because when you remove C-Dilla you disable TurboTax anyway.

A second part of the copy-protection process with TurboTax is "activation". This involves your computer contacting their computer to get a valid behind-the-scenes registration code. This code unlocks the software for use. This activation works the same as Microsoft's Windows XP and Office XP, which has come under considerable crossfire from the consumer. The main problem cited with the "activation" is that your installation is locked into certain hardware aspects of your computer and when you change any of these aspects your code becomes invalid and locks the software again. If, for example, you upgraded to a larger hard drive or replaced your mainboard with a newer model, your software may cease to work. Intuit has stated that they are not issuing replacement activation codes, so for the time being, this presents a problem if anyone upgrades in the near future after installing TurboTax.

Intuit is taking a lot of heat for this decision. Unlike Microsoft, which literally has a lock on operating system software, Intuit has major competitors in the tax preparation software market. Many long-term customers are bailing out of Intuit and switching to H&R Block's "TaxCut".

Enjoy these last few weeks of cooler weather before the mosquitoes take over again. Thanks for reading. Now you're one of the Family!

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Published 2003 by VONTRONICS USA, Naples, FL
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239-597-0001