

SEPTEMBER 2003

WELCOME TO THE SEPTEMBER EDITION OF FAMILY COMPUTER NEWS
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If you have received this newsletter by mistake or do not wish to receive it in the future, then we apologize. Please e-mail us with details at <mailto:support@familycomputerusa.com>

VIRUS MANIA

We've had a very high incident rate of e-mail virus worms in the past month. The MSBlast & SoBig worms, both closely related with many variants, have sent an unprecedented number of infections. This worm type was unique in many ways: only targeting Windows 2000 and XP, and being distributed by open ports instead of e-mail. Once infected, the machines would send out e-mail to everyone on that machine's address list with the added feature of selecting one address at random to be blamed for the wave of infected e-mails. That's why many of you may have received e-mail "bounces" claiming that an e-mail you sent did not get delivered properly. It was actually the result of your e-mail address being on an infected machine that was sending out e-mail to everyone on its list and you getting picked by the virus to be blamed for. Very tricky and difficult to trace down.

Once infected a Windows XP or 2000 machine would literally choke to death on the bogus tasks it was told to do when trying to search for new machines to infect. Since you are able to read this, then you either prevented the virus or haven't received it yet. This virus worm could have been prevented by either updating your Windows or updating your anti-virus. Microsoft released a critical update patch to prevent this abuse and it can still be downloaded and applied by linking to www.windowsupdate.microsoft.com. If you are running Windows 98 or newer, it has a built-in critical update checker that will alert you to a new update you should install. Watch for these notices and take all Critical Updates that you are alerted to.

Keeping your anti-virus software updated is the single most-important thing you can do to prevent the spread of computer viruses. Just because you have a current subscription to an anti-virus product, don't assume that your files are current. Manually check it to make sure that it is no more than a few days since it last checked. Adjust your anti-virus as needed to check more frequently than once a month. And make it a habit to check it manually more often.

ADVENTURES IN BROADBAND

At up to 50 times the speed of dial-up modem access, more people are choosing broadband as their internet connection method. With the choice between cable and DSL, I get many requests for advice on which broadband choice is best. The bottom line selection depends mostly on what choice is available at your location. Not all buildings or communities have both options to choose from. Both choices require that wiring and equipment be installed to accommodate the connections.

Cable modems connect to the same wiring as your TV cable receiver. But the cable service provider that services your building or community (either Comcast or Time-Warner in Naples) must have pre-installed the equipment to be able to handle broadband internet connection at your particular location. Assuming that you have this service available, you can get a cable modem self-install kit or have a cable company service rep come out and install the cable modem for you. A cable modem will connect either by Ethernet (LAN) cable or by USB cable to your computer.

DSL service consists of a dedicated phone line that connects between your location and the closest phone company station which must be less than 5 miles distance from you. Sprint is the service provider in the Naples area. The basic rate for DSL connection provides you with a speed that is approximately equal to a cable modem connection. If you need a faster connection, for example with a business that needs faster connectivity, then DSL has options that allow you to purchase a higher bandwidth or faster connection. A typical connection involves a special DSL modem with a cable that connects to your computer's Ethernet (LAN) connector.

With either service, you have the option of installing the DSL or Cable modem behind a router which will allow you to share the broadband connection with several computers in a small network.

What about costs? If you already have a dial-up internet service provider, for example: AOL, then you are paying about \$25 per month for that service. If you have a second dedicated phone line just for internet dialing, then you can add another \$10-20 per month for the line cost. Compare that to Cable or DSL basic costs of about \$45 per month and you see that the cost is nearly the same for an incredibly faster internet experience. Unless you are using your internet connection service for only basic e-mail, then I would recommend broadband as an excellent way to pump more usefulness out of an aging computer.

Whether you go with Cable or DSL, you will receive a new screen name and e-mail accounts to use as needed. You may or may not be able to use your old familiar name; it depends on if someone else has already selected it at your new service providers' e-mail server. If you absolutely need to retain your AOL e-mail account, then you can get a greatly reduced rate of \$9.95 per month to switch over to a "Bring Your Own Broadband" account.

If you have any questions about broadband, please feel free to call me to discuss your particular details.

9-11 DIGITAL ARCHIVES

This month marks the two-year anniversary of the disaster of 9-11-2001. The September 11th Digital Archive has been collecting various forms of writings, pictures, video and audio regarding this event and will turn their collection over to the Library Of Congress this month for permanent storage.

To view their extensive collection, <http://911digitalarchive.org/>

SECURITY ALERT METER

As the U.S. Department of Homeland Security receives information, it updates its Security Advisory System to inform the citizens of the current status. This direct link shows the current status in the upper right corner and explains in detail what each of the five levels represent. As of this writing, we are at "Yellow" or "Elevated" condition.

<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?theme=29>

HURRICANE SEASON

Don't be caught unaware with a hurricane. With several recent storms and several more developing, the National Hurricane Center, based in Miami, has all the latest details and extensive maps and prediction charts available 24-hours a day.

<http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/>

MARVELOUS MARS

If you haven't already seen the spectacular sight of Mars in the night sky, then now is the time, because at no time in recorded history nor for another 284 years will Mars be this close to Earth. It's easy to spot now; just look to the left of the Moon at the brightest object. Its remarkably reddish tint gives it a distinction among other night objects that are visible with the naked eye. If you get a chance to see it with a telescope, take advantage of it.

http://www.spaceweather.com/delights/mars2003_Night.html

And liberate your imagination with science fiction tales... I highly recommend Ben Bova's "Mars" and "Return To Mars".

<http://www.benbova.net/>

ELECTION CONNECTION

With the upcoming Presidential race and the confusing array of potential candidates I found it interesting to take a quiz to see what presidential-hopeful aligned closest with my ideals. After answering these quiz questions, the candidates, ranked according to the percentage of issues that agree with yours, will be presented for your review. You might be surprised by how your party tendencies shape up!

<http://www.selectsmart.com/president/>

In case I don't get an e-newsletter out in time for next month, Happy Halloween! (my favorite holiday!)

Thanks for reading. Now you're one of the Family!

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