

APRIL 2004

WELCOME TO THE APRIL 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>

It has been a very busy season as evidenced by how long it's been since I sent out the last newsletter. I've been collecting a few goodies to share with you.

YEAR OF THE MONKEY

January 22nd was the New Year's Day in the Chinese calendar. This is a leap year in the Chinese calendar also, but you get a whole extra month during a Chinese calendar leap year! Read more about it and find out what your birth year was at this site. If your birth year isn't listed, just add 12 to the year you were born until you see that year in the chart!

<http://www.new-year.co.uk/chinese/calendar/monkey.htm>

POP-UP SOLUTIONS

Both YAHOO and GOOGLE have created free solutions to the ever-growing pop-up browser ad problem – an add-in toolbar for Internet Explorer. They both work by blocking pop-up advertisements but in exchange, their toolbar remains embedded at the top of your browser window... a good trade-off to prevent the frequent disruptions.

Here is YAHOO's toolbar: <http://companion.yahoo.com/?cpdl=srch>

And here is GOOGLE's: <http://toolbar.google.com/>

I think a more graceful, but still free, solution is from EndPopUps.com. Their browser-attached add-in is smaller and resides over to one side. I have tried them all and they all work well at preventing most pop-up ads, but I personally like EndPopUps the best.

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

ELEGANT SPAM SOLUTION

Spam marches on as an ever-increasing problem. You waste time weeding through it and it wastes bandwidth on the internet. If you never gave out your e-mail address, then you wouldn't get much spam. But then you wouldn't get any e-mail either! One of the biggest ways that spammers get your e-mail is from websites that collect your information when you "sign up" for something. You know the online form... e-mail address is required to continue. Now there is a way to fill out the online forms and not get spammed afterwards.

The folks at Spam Gourmet have a hardy appetite for the stuff. They will absorb and dispose of spam directed at you as a result of filling out those sign-up forms. It sounds a bit complicated, but is better explained directly on their site.

www.spamgourmet.com

It's free and is a good example of a creative solution to the spamming problem. I highly recommend it. Please check it out.

VIRUS PARADE

"Bagels", anyone? How about a "Netsky"? Maybe you've received "an urgent patch from Microsoft" or thought it was the end with "MyDoom". The virus writers have been very busy

lately creating the latest nasties to try your security measures and patience. Some of the recent varieties have been successful at disabling Norton and McAfee, the two biggest anti-virus software programs, so that you are left without any protection. Let's review the basics again...

#1. Keep your anti-virus program current. Be proactive about this and manually check it and force it to update if it seems to not be keeping itself current. Never let a week go by that your anti-virus program hasn't been updated. I don't consider daily updating to be paranoid. Even though most anti-virus programs can update themselves, they do require an active internet connection to be able to do that, so if you have a dial-up connection, get connected first and try to schedule your anti-virus program to work within a time frame when you are usually online.

#2. Keep your Windows updated. Microsoft is constantly issuing updates to correct discovered security weaknesses in Windows and its other products. All versions, since Windows 98, can self-update by first connecting to the internet, then running the "Update Windows" typically found near the top of the Start Menu. Always accept any critical updates from Microsoft because they deal with a proven security weakness and might keep you from being hacked or receiving a virus. Microsoft will never send you an email with a security patch or any other file attached to it, so don't fall for those ruses.

#3. Never accept an e-mail with an attachment unless you were expecting it. Even knowing who is sending you an e-mail isn't enough... many viruses send themselves out in e-mails automatically to everyone on an infected computer's address list pretending to be that person or another random person. (Again, Microsoft will NEVER send you an e-mail with an attachment, so delete them.)

#4. Be cautious when downloading or accepting files from others when using chat software or peer-to-peer file sharing software. Many viruses have been distributed that way.

FREE LONG-DISTANCE PHONE CALLS, ANYONE?

Recently launched, Skype allows anyone with a computer, internet connection, microphone and speakers to speak for free to anyone else in the world that is using the same free software. It is simple to setup and works especially well over a broadband connection. Skype, based in Luxemburg, is from the same group that brought you KaZaA, the free peer-to-peer file sharing system.

What is the downside, you ask? Well, whoever you want to call has to have downloaded and installed the free program AND be online with the program running to be able to receive your call. And I am sure that Skype, like its sister program, KaZaA, is full of spyware. (Spyware is any program that runs in the background without your consent or knowledge whose purpose is to collect information about your computing habits, usually so that pop-up ads can be tailored to your tastes.) But if you have friends with computers at long distances then this may be just for you.

www.skype.com

EXCELLENT WALLPAPER

How about some free wallpaper images to freshen up your desktop? Ryan Bliss offers both free and paid versions of his fantastic artwork that makes perfect backgrounds for your desktop icons at Digital Blasphemy. These are exceptionally good and well worth your time to browse through them.

<http://www.digitalblasphemy.com/dbgallery/>

WEATHER FORECASTING – UP TO 18 MONTHS IN ADVANCE!

The folks at DryDay.com claim to be able to predict dry or wet days in advance with 85% accuracy. That's better than most local meteorologists seem to do with the next day's forecast! This could be very useful when planning an outdoor event for a future date. Here's a link to the current Naples forecast and from there you can select any continental US city.
<http://www.dryday.com/30dayWeather/US/Florida/Naples.html>

TAKE A TRIP...

Here is an interesting visual trip that starts you at the furthest reaches of the universe and, by magnifying each step by 10 times, advances you closer to the Earth zooming in on an oak tree in Tallahassee, Florida, and eventually microscopically viewing protons and quarks in the oak tree's leaf.
<http://micro.magnet.fsu.edu/primer/java/scienceopticsu/powersof10/>

SOMETHING JUST FOR FUN

Build the world's best paper airplane! Follow these easy directions and launch one. Feel like a kid again and share it with a kid, too. Take time to just take it easy. Enjoy!
<http://www.zurqui.co.cr/crinfocus/paper/airplane.html>

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

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